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Mexican War Series

WITH TAYLOR ON THE RIO GRANDE

BY

EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "For the Liberty of Texas," "Under Scott in Mexico," "Dave Porter Series," "Old Glory Series," "Pan-American Series," "Lakeport Series," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY J. W. KENNEDY

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WITH TAYLOR ON THE RIO GRANDE

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PREFACE

"With Taylor on the Rio Grande" is a complete tale in itself, but forms the second of a line of three volumes to be known under the general title of the "Mexican War Series."

In the first volume, entitled "For the Liberty of Texas," we followed the adventures of Dan and Ralph Radbury and their friends during those exciting days when the vast territory of Texas formed, with Coahuila, a part of Mexico, and when the Texans, under the daring leadership of General Sam Houston and others, were fighting so bravely for liberty.

The independence of Texas was followed, some years after, by the annexation of this State to the United States. This action was bitterly opposed by the Mexican government, who had in the past considered the United States a friendly republic. It is but fair to add that the annexation of Texas was likewise opposed by many of our own people, especially by those in the North, who felt that this annexation meant only the extension of slavery.

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The bitterness between Mexico and the United States increased rapidly, and there was a feeling of war "in the air" long before war was actually declared. In these later days it is hard to find any good grounds for the war that followed, but open hostilities began over the boundary line between the two republics, Mexico claiming that the Nueces River should mark the boundary, and our government sustaining the claim of Texas that the real boundary must be the Rio Grande (or Rio del Norte) River, about a hundred and twenty-five miles farther south.

When the call to arms came, the Radbury boys were not behind in doing their duty, and in the following pages are given the particulars of General Taylor's campaign on and near the Rio Grande, at Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, the fall of Matamoras, and, later on, the storming of Monterey and the brilliant victory at Buena Vista, — a victory which soon after brought to "Old Rough and Ready" the highest gift of the American people, — the Presidency of the United States.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

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WITH TAYLOR ON THE RIO GRANDE

WITH TAYLOR ON THE RIO GRANDE

CHAPTER I.

THE RADBURYS AND THEIR HOME

"DAN, when do you think father will return?"

"He said he would be home to-morrow by the latest, Ralph. He was uncertain about seeing Mr. Bartlett and making a sale of those horses. If he met Mr. Bartlett in Austin he ought to be home to-day."

"I am anxious to learn what he'll have to say about this trouble with Mexico. Do you think we'll have another war?" continued Ralph Radbury, earnestly.

"More than likely," returned Dan Radbury. "The Mexicans have never forgiven the United States for taking Texas into the Union, and they have never forgiven us for asserting our independence in the first place."

"If it comes to war this State will be the battle-ground."

"More than likely — and we'll see even hotter times than we did when we fought for liberty, Ralph."

"Oh, Dan, no hotter than that fight at San Jacinto, — nothing could be more fierce than that, — and nothing more blood-curdling than the massacre at Goliad and the fall of the Alamo. I'll never forget them, never!" And Ralph Radbury shook his head sadly. He had been but a boy of eight at the time, and now he was nearly eighteen, but those thrilling scenes were burnt into his brain never to be effaced.

"I reckon you're right," responded the elder brother, slowly. "My, but San Jacinto was hot, and no mistake, and I'm afraid we would have lost if it hadn't been for Sam Houston! How he did fight and urge us on!"

"Will you go into the army again if we have a war with Mexico?"

"That will depend upon circumstances. If the Rangers go, of course I'll go with them."

"I'd like to go myself."

"Somebody ought to remain on the ranch."

"Well, father could do that — along with Pompey and the rest of the hired help. He fought in the War of 1812 and ten years ago, and that's enough for one man, to my way of thinking."

"Yes, father's seen his full share of fighting,

and ought to take it easy for the rest of his days. But there is no telling what he'll do if the war fever strikes him again."

"Well, perhaps there won't be any war, — so we needn't borrow trouble," concluded Ralph, and rode on at a rapid gait, along the trail on the east bank of the Guadalupe River.

It was the summer of the year 1845, and here, in the heart of the great State of Texas, all was as calm and peaceful as though war had never been and never was to be. Crops were plentiful, cattle and horses had never done better, and lawless Indians and desperadoes had been largely driven far to the westward.

In a former volume of this series, entitled "For the Liberty of Texas," the reader was told how Amos Radbury, a widower from Georgia, had emigrated to Texas in the year 1832, and settled upon a promising tract of land not far from the town of Gonzales, and lying upon both sides of the Guadalupe. Amos Radbury had brought with him his two sons, and, young as they were, Dan and Ralph had assisted their father in clearing a part of the land, erecting a cabin and a cattle shelter, and in doing the other necessary work around the ranch, as it was thereafter called. In those days young Ralph had been rather delicate, but outdoor life had done wonders for the lad.

The four years to follow the coming of the

Radburys into Texas were full of peril and excitement. First came the troubles with the Indians and with the many noted desperadoes of the Southwest, and these were followed by the conflict with Mexico for Texan freedom. In this war Amos Radbury, as a lieutenant of volunteers, had done his duty nobly, and so had the elder son Dan, who was in the very thickest of the contest at the bloody and never-to-be-forgotten battle of San Jacinto. Ralph, too, young as he was, had seen a little of the war, and had been taken a prisoner by the Mexicans, to escape, later on, through the friendliness of Big Foot, a Comanche Indian.

During the years to follow the independence of Texas things had prospered wonderfully well with the Radburys. The ranch lands were increased a hundred acres or more, and the cattle had more than quadrupled in number. The rude log cabin had given place to a substantial house containing half a dozen rooms, and the barn and cattle sheds were also vastly improved. As an investment of his own, Dan, now twenty-four years old, was raising a number of ponies for the horse market at Austin, while Ralph had gone into the chicken and egg business with gratifying results.

"We'll all be rich some day," Dan was wont to remark. "Texan land, such as ours, has no equal on the face of this earth." And Ralph was

inclined to agree with him. The brothers worked early and late, rain or shine, and certainly deserved the prosperity that came to them.

The single cloud to their happiness was the feebleness which occasionally came upon their father. Amos Radbury had been severely wounded at the battle of San Jacinto, and being by no means young, this had told upon him, in spite of his efforts to appear as well as ever. Some days he was able to do his full share of work, but there were others when he could scarcely stir because of the sharp, shooting pains which travelled up and down the lower limb which had been pierced by a Mexican bayonet.

"I'm only an old veteran," he would sigh. "I can't get around as I used to."

"Never mind, father," one or the other of the sons would answer. "You've done enough. Let us take hold."

"But I am still too young to sit down and fold my hands," Mr. Radbury would insist.

"Well, you can boss things," and the boys would make him rest in spite of his protestations.

"Father ought not to have gone on that trip to Austin," remarked Ralph, after riding for awhile in utter silence. "He didn't want to let on, but I know his leg hurt him a good deal."

"He told me he was going to consult a doctor while in the city," answered Dan. "He thinks if

he can get hold of some strong liniment it will do him lots of good."

"I have a notion the leg is getting stiff."

"I shouldn't be surprised, although I would hate to see it. Imagine father stalking around with a stiff leg!"

"Well, that would be better than if he couldn't walk at all, Dan. It won't hurt his riding much, anyway."

"That's true."

"By the way, old Poke Stover was going to bring him some Indian medicine. I wonder where Poke is?"

"I'm sure I don't know. He doesn't seem to like the way the country is filling up with settlers. He told me the last time I saw him that if it kept up, there wouldn't be breathing-room enough for all hands," added Dan, with a laugh, in which Ralph readily joined.

"Texas is big enough, goodness knows. But men like Poke think it is crowded if one settler can see another's chimney smoke — he told me that himself. He was cut out for the wilderness — like Davy Crockett."

"That's true. Yet how Crockett did fight at the Alamo — and Poke fought, too! Those men are born fighters, whether of wild animals or men."

"Right you are, and I've got something of a notion that Poke must be off to the Southwest,

stirring up those rascally Indians who stole Harkness's cattle. We can be thankful that none of our cattle have been driven off this year."

"There's no use to brag about that, or we may find some gone before we know it. Kilmer said he saw some fellows around day before yesterday he didn't like the looks of." Kilmer was a cowboy attached to the ranch, having been engaged for that duty by Amos Radbury the summer previous.

"Where did he see them?"

"Up near Pecan Creek. They were riding back of the big rocks, and he says they tried their best to keep out of his sight. There were three of them, and he was pretty certain one of them was a rascal named Snaplot, a horse thief from Missouri."

"If that's the case, we certainly ought to keep our eyes open. We don't want to lose any cattle, or any horses either."

"I warned Kilmer to be on his guard, and he said he was going to follow up the trail to-day, if he could. He would have gone after them at once, but he had to help a couple of cows out of the west-end salt hole. He had a nasty time of it, and came pretty close to being kicked to death. When he got back the men had disappeared."

The brothers had now reached a point where the trail made a sharp turn to the right and then

passed over a series of rough rocks. To the left of them was the smoothly flowing river, glistening here and there in the sunlight; to the right a grove of pecan and other trees, backed up by mesquite brush.

The two were bound for the home of a neighbour who lived two miles up the stream. The neighbour was named Maurice Fielding, and he had offered to trade Ralph fifty odd chickens for two ponies from Dan's stock. Dan was willing to make the trade providing the chickens were worth it.

The ride on the rough rocks separated the boys somewhat, and for the time being the talk came to an end. Dan went ahead, and was just on the point of letting his horse ford a small brook flowing into the Guadalupe when a distant gunshot caused him to halt.

"Did you hear that?" he questioned, as he waited for Ralph to come up.

"I did," was the answer. "It came from the direction of Fielding's house, didn't it?"

"So I should calculate. He must — There goes another shot! And another! He seems to be shooting quite lively to-day."

"There can't be anything wrong, can there?" asked Ralph, with an anxious look on his face. "Would it be possible that those men Nat Kilmer saw went in that direction?"

"Of course it's possible, Ralph. But Fielding may be out hunting, although the shots didn't come from the Big Woods. Come, we'll soon learn the truth," and so speaking Dan forded the brook and made off along the trail at his horse's best speed, with his brother close behind.

CHAPTER II.

THE OLD SAN ANTONIO TRAIL

In those days, when outside help was hard to obtain, the troubles of one ranchman were the concern of all of his neighbours. Those living in the same district were in close sympathy with each other, and woe betide the outsider who came to do wrong or raise a disturbance.

Among themselves, each Texan trusted his fellows implicitly, and, strange as it may seem, a ranchman would frequently go off for several days or a week, and never think of locking up his cabin or house, or his stable. If anybody came on a visit during that time he was expected to make himself at home, and he usually did, and on going away he would leave behind a note, stuck to the kitchen table with a pin or a knife, stating he was willing to settle up on demand, — a demand that, usually, was never made.

"Ain't got no time to take yer money," was the way in which the average Texan would meet the offer of a settlement. "Come ag'in and

charge the bill to me," and a friendly handshake would square matters all around.

Maurice Fielding had come into the neighbourhood two years before, bringing with him his wife, his ten-year-old daughter Alice, and his seventeen-year-old son, Oliver, generally called Ollie for short. The family came from Ohio, where they had once owned a valuable farm. But the estate had got into litigation and Maurice Fielding had come to Texas a comparatively poor man.

The Fieldings were refined folks, and soon a warm feeling sprang up between them and the Radburys. During the first year of his coming to Texas Maurice Fielding had worked for Amos Radbury, leaving his son to take care of the newly made homestead. But now the pioneer had all he could do on his own place, where he raised corn and grain and not a few chickens and horses. Oliver Fielding did his full share of the work, and so did Mrs. Fielding and Alice.

Ralph and Oliver had taken to each other from the start and the two were as much together as circumstances permitted. Dan also liked the newcomer, but he was older, while Ralph and Oliver were almost of an age. As for Alice, she was so sweet and affectionate that no one could help but like her, and both of the Radburys secretly worshipped her.

A few minutes of hard riding brought Dan and

Ralph in sight of the Fielding homestead, a rough but comfortable cabin located on a fork of the Guadalupe, where the ground was high and sandy and free from the perils of inundation. Here a spot of several acres had been cleared, and here were located both a vegetable and a flower garden, the pride of Mrs. Fielding and her daughter.

As the brothers came within sight of the ranch home they saw Oliver Fielding standing on the doorstep, gun in hand, and gazing anxiously in the direction of the forest to the north of the garden patch.

"Hullo, Ollie!" shouted Dan. "Was that you shooting?"

"Dan!" was the reply. "And Ralph! How glad I am that you have come. Have you seen anything of my father?"

"We have not," replied Ralph. "What's the trouble?" he went on, as he and Dan came closer.

"Trouble enough. Six of the horses are gone."

"Gone!" came from the Radburys simultaneously.

"Yes, gone."

"Do you mean stolen?" queried Dan.

"I reckon that's the size of it. They were in the corral behind the barn last night. Now I can't find them anywhere."

"That looks bad certainly. The corral wasn't broken down anywhere, was it?"

"No, but the gate was broken open."

Both Dan and Ralph gave a low whistle. "Horse thieves, sure!" muttered one and the other.

"Father went off at daybreak, on an errand to Big Fork, so as to get back in time to see you about those chickens," went on Oliver Fielding. "I don't suppose he ever thought to look into the corral even though he did have his horse close by."

"Then you don't know how long the horses have been missing?"

"No. I put them up last night about seven o'clock, and that's the last I saw of them."

"Well, if your father is in the neighbourhood those shots ought to bring him home," remarked Dan.

Mrs. Fielding now came out, followed by Alice. Both gave the Radburys a warm greeting, but showed their anxiety plainly upon their faces.

"My husband spoke about some lawless looking men he met up on the range yesterday morning," said Mrs. Fielding. "Perhaps they came here during the night."

"Nat Kilmer saw those fellows, too," answered Dan, and told what the cowboy had said.

"That Jack Snaplot is a bad egg," put in Oliver Fielding. "I heard about him when I was over to San Antonio. One of the storekeepers was

saying it was a wonder the sheriff hadn't put him behind the bars long ago."

"My husband wishes no trouble with any of them," said Mrs. Fielding, anxiously. "But we cannot afford the loss of six horses."

"Six! I wouldn't let them have one!" burst out Ralph. "Let us get on the trail if we can without delay."

"Hadn't you better wait for my husband?"

"Yes, wait for papa," added little Alice. "The bad men may shoot you all."

"We may do some shooting ourselves," answered Dan, with a dry laugh. "No, I agree with Ralph, the sooner we get on the trail the better. As soon as Mr. Fielding comes he can follow us."

"Will you help me?" put in Oliver, and his face brightened at once. "I — I was afraid you might object."

"Not a bit of it, Ollie," cried Ralph. "Come, show us the way to the corral, and see to it that your gun is loaded."

"Oh, I hope there won't be any shooting!" faltered Mrs. Fielding. So far she had seen but little of the seamy side of ranch life.

"There won't be any, unless those horse thieves refuse to come to terms when we meet," answered Dan.

Each of the Radburys carried his rifle, and now

Oliver Fielding lost no time in reloading his own weapon. The latter led the way down to the corral, and the others, including Mrs. Fielding and Alice, followed.

"I can't see much of a trail," remarked Oliver, while the examination of the locality was going on. "These hoof-marks all look alike to me."

"They don't to me," said Dan. "You see, we're used to following a trail," he explained. "Here you are, as plain as day. Those hoof-marks were made after sundown yesterday, and I'll wager a pony on it."

Ralph got down, and after a long look declared that his big brother was right. "Come on," he added, and set off without further ado. Oliver followed, while Dan lingered for a minute to request Mrs. Fielding to send word back to his home should the party not return by nightfall.

Fortunately, Oliver's pet horse had not been among those missing, and he was soon in the saddle with the Radburys. The trail led off to the northwest, straight across the Fielding land grant, and through some low brush, where the ground was marshy and the hoof-marks as plain as day.

Dan kept studying the marks for a long time, and then ventured his guess that three of the horses had been ridden, and gave his reasons for this conclusion.

"A horse with a load is always more steady than one without," he said. "His steps are more even, and, besides, his load makes him sink in deeper where the ground is soft. The three in front had riders, the other three were led."

"It's wonderful how much you know of these things!" exclaimed Oliver. "How did you ever learn so much?"

"You'll get on to it in time, Ollie — after you've been out here as long as I've been. Why, I don't know anything alongside of such a chap as Poke Stover. He can follow a trail as good as an Indian, and he can tell you lots of things I'd never dream of. Now if he was here, he'd probably tell just when the horses were taken, and how, and what sort of rascals took them, and a lot more. And his eyesight is so good he'd spot 'em long before we'd think of clapping eyes on 'em."

"It must be the practice that does it," returned Oliver, with something of a sigh. "But then some take to this outdoor life like a duck takes to water."

"And so will you, in a year or two more," put in Ralph. "I didn't like it at all first; now I wouldn't give it up for a good deal."

"Excepting to go into the army," put in Dan, with a sly wink.

"Oh, that would be different."

"Are you fellows going to war if there is war?"

"I am," answered Ralph.

"More than likely we will," was Dan's somewhat slower reply. "It all depends upon circumstances."

"I'd like to go myself, especially if the fighting is down here in Texas."

So speaking, the three continued on their way, until the Fielding range was left far behind and they plunged into a well-defined road running westward, — one of the old San Antonio trails, — afterward abandoned for the highway further southward. It was now the middle of the afternoon, and the slanting rays of the sun, shooting over the immense trees, cast long shadows across their pathway. All was quiet, saving for the occasional note of bird or the splashing of some tiny brook as it rushed through the bushes and over the rocks on its way to the river miles beyond.

"Do you suppose we'll see anything of those thieves before night comes on?" questioned Oliver, as he cast a glance toward the declining sun.

"I can't say — it will depend upon whether they pushed straight on or stopped somewhere for food and rest," answered Dan.

"This road leads to Nolan's ranch, I believe."

"It does, but there are several forks, Ollie. The rascals may have branched off. I doubt if they would pass Nolan's place in the daytime.

He would be suspicious, and he'd make them halt until he had investigated. He suffered from horse thieves years ago, and he has no mercy for them."

"Well, I don't know as a horse thief deserves much mercy. He does wrong with his eyes wide open, and ought to be ready to stand the consequences."

"No criminal is ready to do that. If they are cornered they'll fight rather than risk arrest. We must be careful of what we are doing," added Dan.

On and on they galloped. Luckily the horses of all were comparatively fresh, so that good time was made on the grassy trail. Once they stopped to water their steeds and get a drink themselves, then they sped on until the first of the forks the elder Radbury had mentioned was gained. Here the trail they were following seemed to be much mixed, and it was a good five minutes before either Dan or Ralph ventured a suggestion as to what the horse thieves had done after arriving at the spot.

CHAPTER III.

IN AND OUT OF A SINK-HOLE

GETTING down from the saddle, Dan made the first examination, and, after a few seconds of intense silence, Ralph followed. Oliver looked on with much interest, but knew enough not to disturb them.

"Well, what do you make out?" asked Dan, presently, as he straightened up and looked at his brother.

"I don't know what to say, exactly. Three seem to have gone down Nolan's way, and three this way. But up there are the tracks of five horses."

"You are right, Ralph, three did start to go Nolan's way, but two came back, a rider and an empty horse, and joined the others on the North Bend Fork. I reckon they came over yonder rocks, after going perhaps quarter of a mile or less."

"But why did they separate, and then why did one rider come back to go up the Fork?" asked Oliver.

"I don't know, excepting it may have been that they thought it best only one of them should go past Nolan's."

"Perhaps the single rider went to Nolan's to get something to eat," suggested Oliver.

"Nolan wouldn't let him have anything unless he questioned the man pretty sharply."

"But he might lie out of the truth," put in Ralph. "A man who will steal horses won't hesitate to lie a streak if he's called on to do it."

The matter was talked over for a few minutes, and the three concluded to ride on to the ranch kept by George Nolan, one of the first settlers in that district, a man who had come in under Stephen Austin. Here they knew they could get something to eat, and possibly Nolan might join them in the attempt to capture the horse thieves.

When the ranch of the pioneer was reached, they found Nolan sitting on his doorstep mending a broken saddle. He was a short, stocky man, with reddish hair and beard, and with blue eyes which could twinkle with merriment or be unusually stern, as occasion required.

"Sure an' I knew it!" he cried, with a trace of Irish accent, as he leaped up. "You're after that mon, ain't ye, now?"

"We are," cried Oliver, "but how did you guess it?"

"Didn't like his looks, an' I was after knowing it was one of your father's hosses," returned Nolan. "I didn't believe his blarney, but I couldn't prove anything, so I had to let him go."

"Who was it?" asked Dan.

"Why, don't ye know? Jack Snaplot — a bad egg, too."

"Snaplot!" came from Dan and Ralph, simultaneously.

"That was one of the men Nat Kilmer saw up to your place," said Oliver.

"The same," returned Dan. "Did he ask for anything?" he went on, to George Nolan.

"Yes, he wanted to buy some grub, but I wasn't after sellin' to him. I told him I knew him, and the best he could do was to clear out. I had my gun with me, so he didn't stop to argy. Then I asked him about the hoss, but nary a bit o' satisfaction would he give me on the p'int, but put spurs to the animal and rode off like the wind."

"Up the road?" queried Ralph.

"Yes; but I watched him from the top o' yonder tree, and I saw him turn up the fork leading to Big Fork."

"Then he went to join the others."

Of course George Nolan wanted to hear their tale, and while he bustled around to get something for them to eat, they told all they knew,

to which he listened in absolute silence, but with a face growing darker each instant. When they had finished, he shook his face vigorously.

"Ought to be hung — every mother's son of thim!" he cried.

"I don't know about that, but I'd like to get back our horses," answered Oliver. "We can't afford to lose them."

"To be sure, lad, to be sure. Well —" Nolan paused for a moment. "We'll get thim back, don't ye be after worryin'."

"Will you join us in this chase?" questioned Dan.

"Yes — as soon as ye have had somethin' to eat. Now fall to, and I'll feed the animals."

Nolan had a stew of beef on the table, also some corn bread and coffee, and the three fell to without delay. It was not an elaborate repast, and was served on a bare table, set with nothing more costly than tin and earthenware, yet all did full justice to what was there, for their long ride had made them hungry. While they were making way with the food without delay, the pioneer cared for their steeds and brought forth his own.

Ten minutes later found all four in the saddle, with Dan and Nolan leading, and Ralph and Oliver bringing up the rear. Nolan set the pace, and it was all the others could do to keep up with him.

"We have not more than two hours o' daylight left," he explained, "an' we must be after makin' the best of it, lads. As soon as darkness comes the chase will end, unless they take to a trail with no forks."

"The Big Fork hasn't many branches," said Dan.

"True for you, Dan — but it has two, an' that's two too many, in the dark." And Nolan laughed broadly.

He had brought along his gun and also a pistol and a bowie-knife, and had given an extra pistol to Dan, so that the party was well armed. A silence followed the last remark, which continued as they rode through a deep wood, where the trail was less than two yards wide and frequently overhung with brush and low-drooping branches.

At last, just as the sun disappeared over the hills in the west, they gained the Big Fork. At once Nolan leaped down, followed by Dan.

"Here is where Snaplot was after joinin' the others," said the pioneer. "See, they waited around until he came."

"Then they lost just so much time," said Dan. "How many hours behind them do you reckon we are?"

"Not more than three — perhaps not more than two and a half."

"Well, they'll have to stop somewhere for food and water," said Ralph.

They pushed on, and now the trail became less easy to follow, as it climbed the rocks and passed through a hollow thick with thorn brush. At the bottom of the hollow was a sink-hole, similar to thousands of others scattered all over Texas.

"Take care here!" cried Nolan, and he, Dan, and Ralph passed around in safety. Oliver was not so fortunate, and ere he knew it his horse was up to the knees in the treacherous spot.

"Hi! back!" he cried.

"What's up?" queried Ralph, who had gone on ahead.

"I'm sinking in the hole!"

"Turn yer hoss!" sang out Nolan, coming back. "Quick, turn him to the left!"

Oliver tried to do as advised, but the steed was stuck and could scarcely budge.

It was a trying moment and one full of peril. But Dan was equal to the emergency, and did something he had seen his father do years before. Reaching back, he hit Oliver's horse over the nose with the butt of his gun. At once the steed gave a lunge backward and turned to one side. Then Dan made another pass, and in sheer terror the horse plunged again and in a twinkle was out of the hole and galloping up the trail at his wildest burst of speed.

"Good fer you, Dan!" sang out Nolan. "'Twas a clever trick, upon me mind it was!"

"Hold tight, Oliver!" cried Ralph, and started in pursuit, and the others came after. Soon the hollow was left far behind, and then the runaway steed gradually slackened his speed until Oliver brought him to a halt.

"My, but that was an experience I didn't calculate on," said Oliver, with a blanched face.

"Ye should have jumped from the hoss," admonished Nolan. "Supposin' he had gone down? Ye would have been after goin' down with him."

"Be careful of where you ride after this," said Dan. "That always was a nasty sink-hole," he added.

On they went once more. It was to be a moonlight night, and already the new moon was showing itself over the tops of the trees. High overhead countless stars were peeping forth. All was quiet, for the day-birds had gone to rest and those of the night had not yet awakened. Presently a few frogs began to croak dismally.

Two miles more were covered when they came within sight of what had, in years gone by, been the cabin of one of the early settlers. But the settler, his wife, and his three children had been murdered by the treacherous Indians, and all they had of value had been carried off. The cabin was now tumbled down at one end and the near by cattle-sheds were a mass of half-burnt ruins. The

well was fallen in, and tall grass and weeds were everywhere in evidence.

"Wonder if they stopped here," said Dan, as the party drew closer.

He had scarcely spoken when Nolan called a sudden halt.

"Stop — I saw somebody!" he said, in a half whisper. "Git behind the trees, quick!"

He led the way, and the others quickly followed. Once behind the trees, all four dismounted.

"I'll go forward and investigate," said the pioneer. "Hold yourselves in readiness to strike, if I call to ye."

To this the others agreed, and in a moment more George Nolan disappeared in the darkness, leaving the three younger members of the party to themselves.

CHAPTER IV.

JUAN THE GIANT

"I HOPE he doesn't get shot," remarked Oliver, after a total silence of several minutes.

"Trust Nolan to take care of himself," answered Dan. "He has been in some of the worst of our Indian fights, and I doubt if there is that horse thief in Texas who can get the best of him."

But little more was said just then, each straining his eyes and ears to take in what might follow. Nolan had disappeared in the darkness under the trees and they could not tell whether he was making his way to the dilapidated cabin or not.

Suddenly a shot rang out, followed by another, and then they heard a cry of alarm, coming in a strange voice. The cry was followed by a shout from Nolan:

"Watch for thim, boys!" shouted the pioneer. "One of thim's comin' your way!"

"Halt!" exclaimed Dan, leaping from behind the trees. "Halt, or I will fire!"

He had seen a man rushing for the rear of what

had been the cattle-sheds, and now he made after the individual.

"Look out, Dan," came from Ralph, and the younger Radbury had scarcely spoken when a pistol rang out and a bullet whizzed through the branches over Dan's head. Dan wanted to fire in return, but the horse thief had already disappeared.

"I'm going after him," said the elder Radbury, and galloped off, the darkness swallowing him up almost instantly.

Ralph scarcely knew what to do. He wanted to help Nolan, yet he did not wish to see his brother go off alone on such a dangerous mission. While he was deliberating another shot rang out, followed by a yell of pain.

The voice was a strange one, and Ralph rightfully guessed that Nolan had laid one of the horse thieves low. A moment later the third of the thieves appeared, riding one of the stolen horses.

"Go up and help Nolan," cried Ralph to Oliver. "I'm going to help Dan," and away he went, riding as hard as the nature of the timberland would permit. It was a dangerous proceeding, but Ralph did not think of himself, his mind was centred upon Dan's welfare.

As Dan rode on, the fellow he was after came into sight, and a few seconds later his companion in crime also appeared. The first was Jack Snaplot, and the second a well-known Mexican horse

thief known as Juan the Giant, because of his unusual height, his real name being Juan Badillo. It may be mentioned here that Badillo had once been attached to Santa Anna's army as a cannoneer, and as such had fought at San Jacinto, but now he had given up army life and was badly wanted by both the Mexican and the United States governments for half a dozen crimes.

"It's Juan the Giant!" cried Ralph, who had seen the man several years before. "What shall we do?"

"We'll follow," answered Dan, recklessly. "Stop!" he cried. "You must give up those horses!"

A mocking laugh was the only reply, and the two horse thieves pressed forward through the timber with increased speed. Then, from the rear came a shout:

"Where are ye?" It was Nolan who was asking the question.

"Here! After two of them!" answered Ralph. "This way!" And he continued to call until he was certain the pioneer was heading in the proper direction.

It was not long before the horse thieves came to a brook and down this they made their way, thinking to hide their trail, should their pursuers wait until daylight to follow them up. From the brook they proceeded northward, to where there

were half a dozen caves in the hills, the stamping-ground, several years before, of the most noted desperadoes of the Southwest. Here they thought to rest for the night, feeling certain they would not be disturbed.

But they did not know the temper of those following them, for they imagined they had to contend with Maurice Fielding and his son, both of peaceful dispositions, and their hired help. Had they known Nolan was after them they would have pushed on with renewed vigour.

The chase continued, and soon Nolan gained the side of the Radburys. "Brought one of thim down," he explained. "He got it in the hip, an' I left young Fielding to watch him till we git back."

He gave a low whistle when told that Juan the Giant was one of the men in front, and said they must run the fellow down by all means.

"He's worse nor Jack Snaplot," he remarked. "Why, the government would give a tidy sum to catch him. He once stole a lot of papers from the Texan commissioners, and made a lot of trouble in consequence. We'll be after gittin' a feather in our cap to run him down."

But this was not so easy, and after crossing the brook they had to slow up, not knowing in what direction to turn next.

"I'll be after scoutin' around a bit," said the

pioneer, and did so, and the others did the same. The moon was now rising, and by the silvery rays Ralph presently made out some hoof-marks which seemed fresh. He got down to examine them, and then began to follow them up without notifying the others.

Ralph was on the right trail, and soon he heard a crashing in the brush ahead of him. The two horse thieves had separated, so as to puzzle their possible pursuers, although they expected to meet again at the caves just mentioned.

As the younger of the Radburys proceeded deeper and deeper into the wilderness on the hillside, he did not notice that he was losing all trace of his brother and Nolan. The trail was as fresh as ever, and now he heard a horse's hoof-beats as they struck on the loose stones of the hillside.

"Dan!" he called, softly, but no answer came back. Then he halted in sudden alarm. Where was his brother, and where was the old pioneer?

"They can't be far off," he reasoned, and then he called again, this time in a slightly louder voice. But only the faint night breeze, as it swept through the topmost branches of the trees, answered him.

"It won't do to go on alone," he reasoned, and started to turn back, when he heard a faint crashing in the bushes on his right. He turned in the

direction and saw somebody on horseback, but it was too gloomy to make out the rider. "Dan!" he called. "Mr. Nolan, is that you?"

No answer came back, but the unknown horseman continued to advance until within a dozen feet of Ralph. Then the youth saw that he was unusually tall, and carried a pistol levelled in his hand before him.

"Juan the Giant!" he ejaculated, and started to raise his own gun, but the Mexican stopped him.

"Drop dat!" he cried, in broken English. "Drop dat, or I kill!" And as he came still closer, the muzzle of his long pistol was thrust almost into Ralph's face.

"What do you mean by stealing Mr. Fielding's horses?" asked Ralph, hardly knowing what to do or say.

"Hoss all right," replied the tall Mexican. "My hoss, dis. Say, you come wid me, no talk neider!"

"Come with you?" ejaculated Ralph.

"Yes, come wid me. No talk more, or I shoot quick! Come!"

There was a wicked look in the tall Mexican's eye, and his finger twitched nervously on the trigger of his pistol. Had the youth made the slightest movement toward raising his gun, Juan the Giant would have shot him down beyond the shadow of a doubt.

There was no help for it, and in the end Ralph was forced to make his way up the hillside toward the caves. Several times he started to speak, but the Mexican cut him short. "No talk now — talk by-me-by," he muttered, grimly.

The first of the caves was gained, when of a sudden two shots rang out through the midnight air. They came from the direction of the brook, and in a few minutes were followed by several other reports in rapid succession. Both Ralph and the Mexican listened to the firing in wonder. But the Mexican said nothing, and soon ordered Ralph forward once more.

They stopped at the second of the caves, a large, gloomy affair, the floor littered with rubbish and the bones of animals brought there for food, and the walls heavy with the smoke and soot of many camp-fires. In front of the cave stood a blasted cedar, and into the side of this were cut the initials of a score or more of men who had been the terror of peaceful Texan settlers for years. Let me add that three years after the war with Mexico this tree was cut down by a settler named White, and the pieces carried away by curiosity hunters.

The cave gained, Juan the Giant made Ralph dismount and hand over his weapons, including his hunting-knife. Then he ordered the youth to go ahead into the cave, while he himself tethered

the horses outside. Then the Mexican placed himself on guard, to watch for the appearance of Jack Snaplot.

It must be confessed that Ralph now found himself in anything but an agreeable frame of mind.

"I ran right into him as careless as could be," he muttered, dismally. "A little child couldn't have done worse. I wonder what he's going to do with me?"

Inside of the cave it was pitch-dark, and he had not gone far before he stumbled over a large, flat rock, which in days gone by the desperadoes had used for a table, where they might eat, drink, and play cards. On this rock he sat down to await developments.

A half-hour went by, and to the youth it seemed an age. Juan the Giant remained at his post outside, with eyes and ears on the alert, still hoping that Snaplot would come. The Mexican was sure there had been a fight near the brook, but he felt equally certain that the Texan horse thief could take care of himself.

But the time went on, and still Snaplot failed to put in an appearance, nor did any one else show himself. Then the Mexican lit a cigarette, smoked it up, and lit another. At length he began to talk to himself under his breath in Spanish.

"What are you going to with me?" It was Ralph who asked the question. He had grown tired of sitting on the rock.

"You go back dare," growled the Mexican. "Go back!" And he raised his pistol.

"But what are you going to do?" insisted the youth.

"I soon show you. Go back, or I kill!" And again his pistol came up, and Ralph was forced to return to the interior of the cave. A little later Juan the Giant followed him and ignited a torch, thus lighting up the scene.

CHAPTER V.

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

To go back to Dan and George Nolan a few minutes after Ralph left them. Both were busy looking for the trail of the horse thieves when the elder Radbury suddenly raised his head and looked around.

"Ralph!" he called.

As we know, there was no answer, and Dan quickly turned to the old pioneer.

"Do you know where Ralph is, Nolan?"

"Sure an' I do not," was the quick reply. "I was after thinkin' he was with yerself."

"And I thought he was on the other side of you!"

Both began to call the youth, but without success. In the midst of this they heard a noise ahead, in a cedar brake, and both started in the direction. In a moment more Dan came in sight of Jack Snaplot.

"Stop!" he cried, but Snaplot immediately disappeared, and they heard him urging his steed along over the rocks leading up the hillside.

Both immediately started in pursuit, and for the time being Ralph was forgotten, neither thinking the youth was in any immediate danger. On they tore, through the brush and over a stony clearing, where Nolan caught sight of the horse thief. But there was no time for a shot, and now Snaplot plunged into a hollow with a suddenness that threw him over his horse's head and left the steed riderless.

"He's lost his horse!" shouted Dan, as the animal came toward him on a walk.

"There he goes — down into the gully!" answered George Nolan. "Catch the hoss an' then let's be after catching the villain."

To secure the horse was easy, and not knowing what else to do with him, Dan tied him to a near-by tree, at the same time taking a good look around so that he might recognise the vicinity later on. Then he rode after Nolan, who was now making his way into the hollow on foot, using his horse as a shield from a possible shot should Snaplot take it into his head to fire.

"You had better be after going to the other side o' the gully," said the old pioneer. "By doin' that we can cage him sure," and Dan followed the advice.

The moon was now shining brightly, along with countless stars, so the hollow, often called an *arroyo* in Texas and Mexico, was by no means

dark. Each moved along with caution, yet almost before he knew it Dan found himself face to face with Snaplot.

The horse thief by this time was thoroughly aroused, and realised that he must act quickly or he would either be killed or captured. He raised a pistol and fired twice in rapid succession. But his aim was poor, and before the second shot Dan had fallen flat and out of sight in the tall grass.

The shots revealed Snaplot to Nolan, but the pioneer was not in a position to fire just then, and instead he ran in something of a semicircle, to come up in the horse thief's rear. In the meantime Dan also withdrew, not wishing to give Snaplot the chance of firing again upon him in such an exposed position.

A long wait followed, each side not knowing what to do next. To a certain degree the horse thief felt himself cornered, and he wondered if the others would wait until daylight revealed his position to them, and he likewise wondered what had become of his two companions, not knowing that one had already been shot down. "Juan ought not to desert me; it ain't handsome o' him," he muttered to himself. For the third man, whose name was Bill Myers, he cared but little.

But Nolan was now on his mettle, and leaving his horse tethered to some brush, he began to

crawl forward like a snake through the long grass. At the same time Dan did likewise from a point at right angles to the trail of the pioneer.

Snaplot heard a slight movement, but, try his best, could see nothing. Becoming alarmed as the sounds came closer, he attempted to shift his position. At once George Nolan opened fire on him, grazing his shoulder.

In a rage over the pain of his wound, the horse thief fired twice in return, but without effect. Then Dan, noting the pistol-flashes, used his gun, and by pure luck struck Snaplot in the calf of the leg. This brought the rascal to his knees, and he rolled over with a shriek of anguish and then began to beg that they stop firing.

"Do you surrender?" demanded Nolan.

"Yes!" was the surly answer.

"Then throw your guns this way."

Against his will, Jack Snaplot complied, and, crawling forward, Dan picked up the weapons. Then both crawled up to the horse thief and kept him covered until they had satisfied themselves that he could do no further harm.

"Think yer smart, I reckon, to catch me," said the thief, grimly.

"I was after calculating to catch ye," answered Nolan, coldly. "Can ye walk?"

"No, I'm shot through the leg," and now the rascal groaned with pain.

They made an examination, to prove the truth of what he said, and then Dan bound up the wound with a neckerchief.

"What has become of Juan the Giant?" asked Dan.

"I don't know."

"Where did you separate?"

"At the brook."

This was all Jack Snaplot could or would tell. His wound pained him a great deal and he begged to be allowed to rest where he had fallen.

"I don't know whether to trust you or not," said Nolan, slowly. "I think I'll tie you up," and this he did, using some of the harness straps for that purpose. Then the horses were all brought to the vicinity, and shortly afterward Dan and the old pioneer set off on the hunt for Ralph and the Mexican.

The hollow had scarcely been left behind, when the moon went under a heavy bank of clouds, leaving them in almost total darkness.

"We've lost the trail now sure," said Dan. "I must say I haven't the least idea where we are going."

"We'll be after strikin' something ere long," responded Nolan, hopefully. "Don't ye lose courage, Dan. Ralph can't be so very far off — nor that greaser either."

"I don't know about that. If he was close by,

why didn't he come up when the firing was going on, answer me that?"

They proceeded up the hillside, feeling certain that Juan the Giant must be bound for the caves, which were fairly well known to the pioneer.

At last the first of the caves was gained, and with extreme caution Nolan proceeded to make an examination of the place and of the woods surrounding it. Dan remained behind on guard.

The moon had now come out again, bathing all once more in silvery brightness. Quarter of an hour passed and Nolan came back, his face plainly showing his disappointment.

"Nothin'," he said, laconically. "Nary a trace of thim anywhere, Dan."

"Perhaps they didn't come this way, after all."

"If they didn't, what way did they go?"

"I'm sure I don't know, unless they struck out for the Cross Timbers."

"They must be somewhere. Let us move on to the caves beyant the ridge," went on the old pioneer.

In lieu of something better to do, Dan was willing, and once more they set off. Both were tired, for climbing the hillside through the thorny brush and over the smooth rocks was no easy task. Once Nolan slipped and scratched himself severely on the thorns, but he did not complain beyond a grunt of disgust as he picked himself up.

At last the pair came in sight of the second cave and once again they halted. This time Dan insisted upon doing the investigating, and he had not proceeded far when he came back in excitement.

"Two horses are there, close to the mouth of the cave!" he cried, in a low voice. "One of the animals is Ralph's."

"Then he and the Mexican must be in the cave, Dan."

"I think so myself, but if Ralph is inside he must be a prisoner."

"True for you."

"Let us lose no time in getting into the cave."

"Be easy, me b'y, be easy," cautioned the old pioneer. "It may be better to make haste slowly, as the old proverb has it. If the greaser has your brother a prisoner, we had better try to take him by surprise."

So speaking, Nolan started off for the cave, with Dan beside him, both without dreaming of the surprise which awaited them.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAVE ON THE HILLSIDE

As soon as he entered the cave, Juan the Giant struck a flint and steel he carried, and made a light with which he lit a torch. This light threw grotesque shadows on the walls and flooring, but on the whole made the interior far more cheerful to Ralph than it had been.

The youth could not help but watch the Mexican curiously, for Juan the Giant seemed to be revolving in his mind something out of the ordinary. Every minute or two he would look at Ralph curiously as if about to speak, and then turn away as if he had changed his mind.

"What are you going to do?" Ralph asked, when he could stand the silence no longer.

"You name Radbury, hey?" queried the Mexican, with a sharp look. "You son of him Amos Radbury, hey?"

"Yes, I am Ralph Radbury, the son of Amos Radbury," answered the youth. "What of that?"

"I know you dadder."

"You mean my father?"

Juan the Giant nodded. "Him a werry good man — nice man, Señor Radbury," and he smiled broadly, but in a fashion that Ralph did not think oversincere.

"If you think my father is a nice man, why do you keep me a prisoner?"

At this the Mexican shrugged his shoulders. He had some Indian blood in his veins, and he was as shrewd as he was unprincipled. "You try to get me into trouble, not so, hey? I let you go, you shootta me maybe."

"What do you want to turn horse thief for?"

"Me no hoss tief — all big mistake him. I go to trade hosses, dat's all."

"Well, you had better give me my gun and knife and let me go," went on Ralph, not wishing to anger the rascal by insisting that he was a thief.

But at the request Juan the Giant shook his head determinedly.

"No, you stay by me, you all right here," he answered. "I no hurt Señor Radbury's son, no."

"But I don't want to stay here."

Again the Mexican shrugged his shoulders. Then of a sudden he caught Ralph by the arm.

"March along!" he cried. "Come! You make trouble, you be sorry!" and he shook his pistol suggestively.

"Where do you want me to go?"

"I show you. March!"

There was no help for it, and Ralph moved on, to the rear of the cave, which proved to be a rambling affair shaped somewhat like the letter L. Juan came close behind him, carrying all of the weapons and holding the torch high overhead. Once Ralph thought to turn on the Mexican, but a look at the tall fellow made him realise how foolhardy such a movement might prove.

The extreme rear of the cave reached, the youth was surprised to behold a narrow passageway leading, fifty feet further on, to a series of rude stone steps. Mounting the steps, the pair gained the entrance to another cave. Here the passageway was not much over a foot wide, and Juan the Giant squeezed through only with the greatest of difficulty.

"You stay here now," he said, in his broken English. "Make noise, I come back and tie you so!" and he placed his hand over his mouth to signify that he meant a gag.

"Are you going to leave me?" questioned Ralph, in fresh alarm. The inner cave looked far from inviting.

"Leave little while, dat's all. Keep still!"

With these words the tall Mexican retraced his steps and squeezed himself out of the smaller cave. Close at hand was a tall, thin stone, and

with an effort he placed this in the narrow passageway, blocking it completely and leaving Ralph in total darkness. Then the youth heard him tramp back whence he had come.

If Ralph had been dismayed before, he was doubly so now, for he felt that the Mexican had some new scheme which he intended to work. What the scheme was he could not imagine.

"He's up to no good, that's certain," he mused, with a sober face. "His pretending to be a friend to father is all a farce. I reckon I can be thankful if I get out of this adventure with a whole skin."

Ralph wondered what had become of Dan and Nolan. Were they on Juan Badillo's trail or were they having their hands full with Jack Snaplot?

"If they were coming this way they ought to be close by," he reasoned. He thought something of calling out, but then realised that the cave must be far underground and that his voice would not carry beyond the rocky walls of his prison.

He searched through his pockets and at last found a couple of brimstone matches which Juan the Giant had failed to take from him. Lighting one of these, he tore from the lining of his jacket some cloth and ignited it for tinder. Then he hunted around until he found a half-burnt torch which he relit after much difficulty. By swinging the torch around half a dozen times

"AHEAD IN A CORNER GLEAMED TWO WILD LOOKING EYES."

he at last made it blaze up and throw out considerable light.

Light in hand, he began an examination of his prison. As said before, the inner cave was a small affair, the roof being just above his head. It was crooked, and on the flooring lay loose stones and several heaps of rubbish. Over these he stumbled until he came in view of the end of the cave.

Suddenly a sight caught his eyes which made him come to a sudden halt. Ahead in a corner gleamed two wild looking eyes, — the angry and treacherous eyes of some beast of the forest.

Ralph was shocked, and leaped back as soon as he saw his danger; for danger there was and of a sort not to be despised. At the same moment the wild beast let out a snarl of rage, and by the sound the youth knew that the animal was a mountain wolf, a creature which grows to great size and strength in certain portions of the Southwest.

The mountain wolf continued to snarl and Ralph continued to retreat, holding the torch well before him, for he knew that all wild animals have a horror of fire and will not go close to it if they can possibly avoid it.

The youth wished he had a gun or a pistol, but nothing was at hand excepting the loose rocks, and he picked up one of these, of uneven surface and weighing several pounds.

He could not imagine how the wolf had gotten into the cave unless by the front entrance. If this was so, the appearance of himself and the Mexican must have driven the beast through to the rear, and here he was now at bay.

As Ralph retreated he kept his eyes on the wolf, and presently he saw the beast move along one of the walls of the cave, as if to get behind his human enemy. Instantly Ralph turned the torch in that direction, at which the wolf let out a fierce snarl of rage and retreated to the other side of the rocky chamber.

The youth was in a cold perspiration by this time and would have given all he was worth to be miles away from this horrible situation. But he could not flee and had to stand his ground, and this he did, in the centre of the cave, while the wolf circled around and around in a vain endeavour to get out of the reach of the torch and attack him from the rear.

At last, with a yelp, the wolf made a leap straight for Ralph's shoulder. Instantly the youth let fly the stone with all of his strength. It caught the beast fairly and squarely on the nose and drew blood, and with a howl the wolf dropped to the flooring and slunk into a corner.

The success of this throw encouraged Ralph somewhat, but he realised that the worst of the battle was still to come, for the eyes of the beast

now blazed like those of a serpent. As quickly as he could he caught up another stone and began to swing the light into a brighter blaze. The torch was now pretty well burnt out, and he made a silent prayer that it might last until the awful battle should come to a close.

A few minutes passed — to Ralph they seemed an eternity — and the wolf made a second leap, but this time high up, as if to come down upon the youth's head. His back struck the ceiling of the cave, and at the same instant Ralph threw the stone, which merely grazed the wolf's shoulder. Then down came that awful weight on the youth's left arm.

The wolf tried to cling fast, but with a twist Ralph jerked himself loose, and then, with the quickness of lightning, he thrust the burning torch directly into the beast's face.

There was a snarl, and the hissing and odour of burning hair, and the wolf fell back. His left eye had been almost put out by the torch, and yelping with pain he turned and sped for the rear of the cave. Here he remained for several seconds, as if meditating another attack, then turned and leaped up on a shelf of rock out of sight.

With bated breath Ralph watched the various movements of the beast, at the same time picking up another stone lying at his feet. He was surprised to see the animal disappear, and he won-

dered if there was another cave, opening up from the shelf. With extreme caution he approached the spot, and getting up on a mound of rocks surveyed it at something of a distance. There was a gloomy hollow beyond, and the wolf had utterly disappeared within it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MESQUITE BRAKE

It was now high time to obtain a new torch, and Ralph began to search around immediately, before that in his hand should go out. Fortunately, those which had been used before were still in evidence, and soon he had another, even better than the first with which he had provided himself.

Lighting the second torch, he whirled the old one over his head and hurled it far into the space behind the rocky shelf. It struck a barrier well to the rear and dropped on a rock still burning brightly. He expected a growl from the mountain wolf to follow, but all remained as silent as before.

This puzzled him. Was the beast dead or had he escaped through some passage into the outer world? He listened with strained ears, but no sound reached him excepting the distant trickling of water as it fell over the rocks.

Ralph's curiosity now became high concerning the opening into which he had flung the torch. If it led to the outer air he was greatly tempted to

explore it, even at the risk of meeting the mountain wolf again.

"I've got to risk something," was what he told himself. "When that greaser comes back there'll be no telling what he'll do with me."

Lighting another torch, he climbed upon the shelf and began to move forward, with a light in each hand. He could not stand upright and soon he had to drop to his knees. The passageway was not over a yard wide, and soon it narrowed to half that width. He looked ahead as far as he could, but the wolf was gone, and it may be added here that Ralph never saw the beast again.

He was now certain that the passageway led to the outer world, for there was a current of cool, fresh air, totally different from the mouldy atmosphere of the caves below. He continued to crawl on, over some dirt and stones which seemed to have fallen but recently, and this was a fact, for before that the caves had had no outlet up the hillside.

At last he came to a mass of brushwood, and pushing this aside he emerged into the silvery moonlight and stood upright. He found himself in the midst of a mesquite brake, with here and there a lonely cedar or hemlock tree. All was as silent around him as a tomb.

For the moment after coming into the opening, Ralph gazed around anxiously, then, satisfied that

the wolf had taken himself off for good, he began to wonder what had best be his next move.

"I suppose I had better get down the hillside first," he reasoned. "If that Mexican finds me missing he'll be sure to follow through that passageway, if he can get through. He may —"

The youth broke off short, for just then a gunshot rang out on the still air. It came from below him, and he knew the weapon must have been discharged close to the entrance of the caves.

"Somebody must be having a fight with Badillo," he muttered. "I hope they capture him — he certainly deserves it."

As quickly as he could he began to climb down the hillside, which was no easy task, for the rocks were smooth and slippery, and there were several difficult arroyos to cross where the thorn bushes grew only too thickly. At one spot he had to make a wide détour, and, consequently, it was a good half-hour before he reached the lower trail — that which he had travelled on coming to the caves.

Suddenly a form appeared in the darkness, followed by another, and a second shot rang out. Then Ralph made out his brother and called to him.

"Ralph! Where have you been?" demanded Dan as he came up.

"Been in the caves, a prisoner of Juan the Giant. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, and Nolan just fired at him. The rascal is trying to escape on one of the horses."

"We must catch him by all means."

"That is easy enough to say, but it's not so easy to do in the darkness, even if it is moonlight," grumbled Dan. His climbing was beginning to tire him.

"Where is Nolan now?"

"Up behind the cave. There he goes. Nolan!"

"Is that you, Dan?"

"Yes, and here is Ralph."

"Good enough. Is he safe an' sound?"

"Yes, I'm all right," answered Ralph. "But the greaser cleaned me out of everything I had."

"Robbed you?" queried Dan.

"That's about the size of it. First he took my gun and my knife, and then he made me turn out all of my pockets."

"Humph! Did he get much?"

"He got that old silver watch father let me wear, and five dollars I was going to let Ollie have for those prize chickens of his. I don't care so much for the money, but I hate to lose the watch — father carried it in the War of 1812, if you remember."

Nolan now came up and listened to Ralph's tale, and then he and Dan told how they had come

up and caught sight of the horses. They had met Juan the Giant at the mouth of the cave, and a hand-to-hand struggle had ensued, and Nolan had been cut in the shoulder with the Mexican's hunting-knife. Then Badillo had managed to get on one of the horses, and had made his escape in spite of all their efforts to lay him low.

"I think I'm after hittin' him in the arm," said Nolan, "but I am not certain."

After they were satisfied that the man had escaped them and that further pursuit would be useless, torches were lit and they went into the cave. Here were found Ralph's gun and hunting-knife, but the other articles were gone.

Dan listened to the story of the mountain wolf with interest. "You're lucky to escape so easily," he said. "Remember the fate of Si Kenwith." The man he mentioned had been a settler not many miles to the north. One night he had heard a noise under his cabin floor, and, going out, had been attacked by a mountain wolf and killed before his wife or son could come to his assistance. Such was one of the many perils of the pioneers of this section of our country. The killing of Silas Kenwith caused the settlers for miles around to organise what was called a grand hunt, and during this hunt, which lasted nearly a month, thousands of wild animals, including over two hundred wolves, were slain.

It was nearly morning when the party returned to where Jack Snaplot had been left. They found the horse thief in a doze, the result of his loss of blood. The horses were still there, and soon they had the wounded man on horseback and were making their way to where Oliver had been left to care for Bill Myers.

Oliver was waiting anxiously for them, and gave a long sigh of relief when they appeared. "I was afraid something had happened to you," he said.

"Well, something did happen," replied Ralph.

"I see you've got another of them."

"Yes," said Nolan. "How is Myers?"

"All right. He's not hurt so very much, and he tried his best to bribe me to let him go."

"Did, eh?" roared the old pioneer. "Sure, lad, you should have broken his head for that."

"I told him such talk was useless," answered Oliver.

"I'll bet that made him mad, Ollie," ventured Dan.

"It did, and he swore like a pirate, but I made him shut up by threatening him with the pistol. He hasn't said a word since."

They went into the dilapidated cabin, and Nolan held a talk with Bill Myers. The horse thief was a very rough fellow, worse even than Snaplot, and the talk ended without satisfaction upon either side.

"You had better let me go," growled Myers. "If you don't, remember the whole gang will be down on you for it."

"Sure, an' I'll be after risking the gang," returned Nolan. "You have got to go to the Gonzales lock-up, an' that's all there is to it."

Myers thought at first that he was the only one who had been captured, and he felt better when Snaplot was brought in. The two wanted to talk, but neither Nolan nor the Radburys would allow this.

"You'll only plot to escape," said Dan. "You can do your powwowing when you are in jail."

"Humph! think you are big to catch us, I reckon," sneered Snaplot.

"It was certainly a good job done."

"Maybe; but you fellows haven't seen the end of this — not by a jugful."

"We'll risk the end — after you are behind the bars," said Ralph, and Oliver said practically the same.

The horse thieves wished to delay their transfer to the Gonzales jail, and so pretended to be too much hurt to be removed. But Nolan and the others made an examination and bound up the wounds afresh, and then made them mount, and long before noon they were on their way to the Fielding homestead.

Less than half of the way was covered when

they met Mr. Fielding, who had been out in the woods the greater part of the night hunting for them.

"I was afraid Ollie would get into trouble," he said. "You see he isn't used to anything like this."

"I'm all right," said the son. "And I've got to get used to it some day."

The return to the Fielding homestead was made without further incident, and here they left the horses which had been stolen, all of course except the one Juan the Giant had taken.

"One isn't so bad," said Maurice Fielding. "But I couldn't have stood the loss of the half dozen."

After some talk it was decided that Nolan, Maurice Fielding, and Dan should ride to Gonzales with the prisoners, while Oliver was to remain at home with his mother and sister. Ralph was to go on with the others, but was to drop off at his own home.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TROUBLE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO

WHILE the party is journeying forward with its prisoners, let us look for a moment at the situation between the United States and Mexico, and try to learn what really caused the war which was now so close at hand.

Readers of the first volume of this series already know how it came to pass that Texas left the Mexican Confederation and declared for freedom, and how dashing General Sam Houston made that freedom a real thing at the wonderful battle of San Jacinto. This had occurred about ten years before, in 1836, and one year later the United States acknowledged the independence of the Lone Star State, as it was called, because of its seal, which is a star set in a circle with a wreath.

Texas remained independent for ten years, and then applied for admission into the United States, then at peace with the world. This admission was bitterly opposed both from without and within. The opposition from within came from those who

held that the admission of this State meant only the extension of slavery, and they held that Texas would soon be divided into half a dozen slave States in consequence; the opposition from without came mainly from Mexico, which was considered a friendly republic, the Mexicans holding that for the United States to take up the cause of Texas would be a blow at her which she did not deserve.

In addition to these there were other causes at work, which were finally pushed forward as the real causes of the war. A number of outrages had been committed by irresponsible Mexicans upon American citizens, and upon American ships sailing in the Gulf of Mexico and upon Mexican rivers, and it was claimed by the government at Washington that the Mexican government would make little or no redress. There was a loud and constantly increasing clamour for justice, which swiftly kindled into the spirit of war, and, right or wrong, war presently came, with all of its awful results.

Ever since Texas had established her independence there had been a dispute regarding the southern boundary-line. Mexico contended that the Nueces River must be the boundary, Texas held out for the Rio Grande, about a hundred and twenty-five miles farther south. When Texas became a part of our union this dispute was trans-

ferred to the United States, and at once Mexico took steps to guard her borders, as she expressed it, by massing an army at Matamoras to repel the northern invaders.

This massing of an army, either for offence or defence, was looked on with suspicion by the United States, and in the summer of 1845, General Zachary Taylor, who was then in command of our army at New Orleans, the headquarters of what was termed the First Military Department, was ordered to Texas, to Corpus Christi, on the *lower* side of the Nueces River, — in what Mexico stoutly maintained was her territory. General Taylor sailed from New Orleans on the 23d of July, with two steamboats and three other vessels, bound for Aransas Bay. On the third of the following month his whole army, then called the Army of Occupation, landed on St. Joseph Island, in Corpus Christi Bay.

But few of the settlers in the interior of Texas knew of the movement of the United States army, for methods of communication were still decidedly primitive. The first to bring the news to the Radbury ranch was Mr. Radbury, who came in shortly after Ralph's arrival, and just after Nolan and Dan had gone on to Gonzales with the captured horse thieves.

"War is almost a certainty now," he said, after listening to what his younger son had to tell.

"Austin is full of excitement, and men are parading the streets in vast crowds. President Jones means business, I reckon." He referred to the President of Texas.

"Has General Taylor gone to St. Joseph's Island with many troops?" questioned Ralph.

"No, not so many, only eight companies, so far, I was told. But other troops are on the way, and I was told that Secretary Marcy has authorised the general to call for volunteers from Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Kentucky."

"Won't Texas furnish any troops?" went on the youth, anxiously.

At this his father looked at him sharply.

"Do you wish to volunteer, Ralph?" he questioned.

"I will if I am wanted."

"I thought you saw enough of fighting ten years ago, when you were but a little chap."

"Why, I didn't see anything to speak of, father; that all fell to you and to Dan."

"Well, I venture to say that Texas will furnish all the troops required of her. If war comes I think it will be far more of an outbreak than was the contest between Texas and Mexico."

"I don't see why Mexico can't leave us alone and let us do as we please."

"She is jealous of the United States, and doesn't want to see the Union keep on growing.

Besides, we Texans have never been forgiven for fighting for our liberty."

"Do you think there will be a battle soon?"

"There is no telling, Ralph. The politicians say they will do all in their power to avert war, and some commissioners are to be sent to Mexico on a mission of peace, but that may amount to but little. Somehow, I feel it in my bones that war is bound to come, sooner or later."

"Well, if war does come, Mexico will get the worst of it."

"I think so myself, unless some foreign power steps in to help her."

"Will any foreign power do that?"

"That remains to be seen, my boy. When war begins there is generally no knowing where it will end."

"Well, if it comes, I'm going to the front, father."

"Then you do long to be a soldier?"

"It isn't exactly that; I want to see Texas a part of the United States, and I want to see the Mexicans whipped. Why, to think of the massacre at Goliad and the fall of the Alamo still makes my blood run cold. By the way, what has become of the Mexican general, Santa Anna? Is he still living in obscurity?"

"I don't know, but I shouldn't be surprised to see him once more at the head of their army, if this war comes off. He is the sort of fellow the

average Mexican can't resist, in spite of his bluster and his failures."

In the meantime Dan, with George Nolan and the horse thieves, had reached Gonzales, to find the town in high excitement. Men were parading the streets, and volunteers were being called for to join in the coming war against Mexico. Such was the clamour that but little attention was paid to the prisoners, who might, on another occasion, have been captured by a mob and strung up, for horse stealing in those days was considered next to a capital crime. The thieves were placed in the jail, and the jailer said he would see to it that they got no chance to escape.

For several years Dan had belonged to a local body of military men known as Rigley's Rangers, because they were commanded by an old Indian scout named Jason Rigley. Their headquarters were at a local livery-stable, and to this place Dan now made his way, where he found a crowd of men, young and old, assembled, eagerly discussing all the news from Austin, the State capital, from Washington, and from the banks of the Nueces River. As yet Texas had never occupied the land between the Nueces and the Rio Grande, although laying claim to it.

"It's gwine ter be wah this time an' no mistake," cried one of the Rangers, a settler from the Missouri flats. "An' at the end on it Mexico

will find she has got to the end o' her string, heah me!" And he shook his head as if that statement ended all dispute.

"Will you go, Bassett?" questioned Dan.

"To be suah, Radbury, to be suah! Ev'ry honourable gen'man o' the honourable South will go."

"You'll go, won't you, Radbury?" questioned another of the Rangers.

"If our company is called out, yes."

"Well, you can lay low for the call at any time now. Old Rough and Ready wouldn't be sent down to Corpus Christi unless something important was in the wind."

"The greasers have got to take a back seat in this part of the world," put in another Ranger, who rejoiced in the nickname of Parson Beans, because he loved both to talk and to eat beans. "We are a superior race, and they must bow to the inevitable. If they will not, off will go their heads, and the Mexican Confederation will be at an end. The glorious future of Texas, and the equally glorious future of the United States, cannot be halted by the foul designs of those who would put their hands to our throats and crush us!"

"Hurrah for Parson Beans!" came from the rear. "Thar's undiluted eloquence fer you! Give us some more, Parson!"

"We are a Heaven-favoured people," went on the talkative Ranger. "Our destiny is manifest. Onward the march of progress takes its way. The Mexicans must clear the track, or be trodden under foot like — er — like — "

"Like snakes before the flying buffalo," suggested somebody standing near.

"Exactly, like snakes before the flying buffalo, the mighty monarch of our noble plains. They say we are doing this to extend slavery, but — "

"What if we are? slavery is all right," came from a corner of the headquarters. "The man who says it ain't has got to fight me."

"I was going to remark, my friend, that — er — that slavery has nothing to do with the matter. It is a question as to whether Texas and the United States shall do as they please, or whether Mexico shall — er — shall dictate as to what's to be done."

At this sentiment there was a loud burst of applause, in the midst of which the Parson was carried off for some "liquid refreshments." Half the crowd went along, leaving Dan alone in one part of the headquarters with Nolan.

"Some of the boys are red-hot, no doubt of that," remarked the old pioneer, as he gazed after the departing ones. "They would fight to-morrow if they were after gettin' the chance."

"War will mean another upsetting in Texas,"

returned Dan. "For this State will be the battle-ground, I suppose."

"Unless we're after carrying the war into the enemy's country, as it is called."

"You mean the United States army will march into Mexico?"

"Why not, if war is really declared? I would rather see the fighting there than here," continued George Nolan.

"Oh, so would I," answered Dan; and there the conversation ended, for the time being.

Several days later Snaplot and Myers were tried and sentenced to several years' imprisonment each. After this a long hunt was made for the Mexican, Juan the Giant, but without success.

"Reckon he's cleared out for Mexico," said Dan. "I suppose I'll never see him again." But in this Dan was mistaken. He was to meet Juan Badillo again, and under most surprising circumstances.

CHAPTER IX.

HUNTING FOR DEER

THE summer and winter months passed rapidly upon the Radbury ranch. There was work enough for all hands to do, and when Ralph was not extra busy he would go over and give Oliver and his father "a hand," as he termed it, for which the Fieldings were very grateful.

During the winter the Radburys heard once of Juan the Giant. He had been seen at Saltillo, and while there and half under the influence of liquor had made his threat, that sooner or later he was going to get even with those who had interfered with his taking off of the Fielding horses.

"He is a thoroughly bad egg," was Mr. Radbury's comment when he heard of this. "If you ever meet him, beware, or he'll stab you in the back. A Mexican with Indian blood in him is not the man to cross."

During the winter old Poke Stover, the frontiersman, came to the Radbury place, and everybody was glad to see him.

"Mighty sorry I wasn't here when you had

the trouble with them hoss thieves," he said. "Wouldn't have liked no better sport nor to have run 'em down."

"I wish you had been along," answered Dan. "I don't believe Juan the Giant could have given you the slip."

"Your father is right about that varmin, Dan; he's a bad egg an' no takin' it back. If ye ever set eyes on him, shoot fust an' think afterward — an' ye won't be doin' no wrong, mark my words."

Poke had been over to Austin, and he came with the news that war was now more certain than ever. "Them greasers won't listen to no reason, an' the United States commissioner can't do nuthin' with 'em," he said. "I reckon as how Old Rough an' Ready will have to fight 'em to bring 'em to their senses."

During the holidays Poke took both Ralph and Dan out hunting several times, and once Oliver went along. On the latter trip there was a light fall of snow on the ground, and Poke calculated that it was excellent weather to track some deer which had been seen in the vicinity.

"There's a silver deer in the crowd," said the frontiersman. "If we can knock him over it will be sumthin' wuth while."

"Yes, indeed," answered Dan. "I have always wanted to get a silver deer, but have never had the chance."

The party of four started away from the Fielding ranch on foot, Stover, Dan, and Ralph having come that far on horseback. Each carried a gun and a pistol, as well as a game-bag, containing a day's rations. They left at noon, and did not expect to get back until evening of the next day.

From the Fielding ranch they struck almost due north until they came to the first section of what was termed the Cross Timbers, and from here they went westward.

The air was clear and cold and each member of the party was in high spirits, anticipating no end of sport. As they hurried along they saw many birds, including wild turkey, pheasants, and a few quail, and Oliver wanted to bring some of them down, but Poke demurred.

"We don't want 'em for food just yet," said the frontiersman. "And it won't do to lug 'em along till night. Wait for sech small game till we are homeward bound," and Oliver did wait, although anxious to "pull a trigger on something," as he declared.

The woods were full of small animals, jack-rabbits and the like, and occasionally they saw a fox at a distance, and once they saw tracks which looked, to Stover, like those of a black bear. "Might follow him up," he suggested, but the younger members of the crowd voted to keep on until something was seen of the deer.

"'THE DEER IS THAR!' HE SAID"

By three o'clock in the afternoon the old frontiersman calculated that they had covered fifteen miles. They were now on a range of hills overlooking Evergreen Valley, with its numerous cedars and evergreen brush. Before them stretched a hollow a mile wide by several miles long, while behind them were the hills in which were located the caves which have already figured in this tale.

Poke Stover was in advance, and, peering over some rocks in front of the crowd, he suddenly motioned the others back.

"The deer is thar!" he said, in a low voice. "Be careful how ye look at 'em!"

They were careful, and, peering forth, saw a herd of six deer near the other side of the hollow. Five were in a bunch, the sixth was somewhat apart from the others, and this was — a silver white!

"The silver deer!" murmured Dan, and his eyes sparkled. "I wonder if I can bring him down from here."

"Better not try it, Dan," replied Stover. "We'd do better to work our way around to the southward — the wind is settin' the other way. Come!"

Poke Stover led the way with caution, and the others followed, being careful to keep out of sight of the game and to make as little noise as possible. Oliver's heart beat rapidly, for this was his first

regular deer hunt, but Ralph and Dan were almost as cool as Poke Stover himself.

So far the sun had been shining brightly, making the snow of dazzling whiteness, but now the orb of day was hidden by a mass of clouds, and it grew somewhat darker in consequence, while the wind began to blow stronger.

"Goin' to have another storm," grumbled Stover, after an examination of the heavens.

"Let us try to get those deer before it comes," said Ralph. "We may not get another such chance."

On they went with increased speed until they gained what Stover thought was a fairly favourable position.

"Ralph, you had better stay here, with Ollie," said the old frontiersman. "Dan, supposing you take to yonder fallen tree? Then I can go into yonder timber."

These suggestions were satisfactory all around, and then it was settled that Dan should try for the silver deer, while Ralph and Oliver should try for two others which were pointed out. Stover would reserve his fire until he saw how matters stood after the opening shots.

In a few minutes more they were all ready, Dan kneeling behind the fallen tree that he might get a better aim. Ralph and Oliver were behind some rocks.

Bang! It was the report of Dan's gun, and it was immediately followed by the cracking of the firearms in the hands of Ralph and Oliver.

As the reports died away the silver deer was seen to leap up into the air. As he came down, he started to run, then staggered from side to side and fell headlong.

"Hurrah! I've got him!" shouted Dan, enthusiastically.

One of the other deer had also fallen, that shot by Ralph, although he was far from dead, having had his foreleg shattered. The third deer was also wounded, but was yet able to run after the other deer, who at the first shot were off like the wind.

It was now that Stover's gun spoke up, and one of the flying beasts came down like a lump of lead, shot through the heart. Then the old frontiersman let drive with his pistol, finishing the animal Oliver had wounded. In the meantime the others turned in to end the sufferings of Ralph's prize.

In less than ten minutes it was all over, and the four deer lay scattered in the snow, the silver deer in the centre of the number. The party came closer and inspected their prizes with undisguised admiration.

"That's a hunt wuth comin' for," was Poke's comment. "Four at a lick! No party could do better'n that."

"I wouldn't have got mine if it hadn't been for that shot of yours," ventured Oliver, a bit crestfallen.

"Never mind, lad, ye struck him fust, an' that's something. Why, ye did well not to get the buck fever when ye was ready to fire. I've knowed some tenderfeet couldn't do a thing when it come to the p'int."

"That's the way it was with me," said Dan, with a laugh, which he could now well afford. "The first deer I aimed at, my heart went into my throat and I shook as if I had a chill."

The silver deer was voted a great beauty, as indeed it was, with its soft coat of glistening white, and Stover said Dan must take care not to injure the pelt.

"It's beginning to snow!" exclaimed Oliver, as a flake fell upon his hand.

"Where shall we camp?" questioned Ralph.

"I was going to suggest yonder timber," answered the old frontiersman. "But if this gets bad —" He finished with a shake of his head.

"Why, you don't suppose we'd be snowed in, do you?" questioned Dan.

"No, not exactly, but thet wind — Jest listen, boys!"

They did listen, and from a great distance heard the wind rising in the Cross Timbers with a dull humming sound. Ralph looked at his brother and

turned slightly pale. Oliver did not seem to understand.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It means that we may have a blizzard," answered Dan. "You have never experienced one, have you?"

"No."

"Well, you don't want to — not while you are out in a place like this."

"Do you think there will be much snow?"

"No, but the wind will make up for it, Ollie. Many a man has lost his life in a Texan norther. Poke, what shall we do?"

"Reckon we had best make fer the fust o' them caves," replied the frontiersman.

"And what of the deer?" asked Ralph. "Going to leave them behind?"

"We can't take 'em all along. Let us take the silver fellow. We can come back for the others when the blizzard is over."

So it was arranged and then the body of the deer was placed on some cedar boughs, to which a rope was attached. This done, all set to work to draw the improvised drag out of the hollow and up to the cave which had been mentioned.

CHAPTER X.

CAUGHT IN A TEXAN BLIZZARD

POKE STOVER had spent enough of his life in the open to know just what sort of a storm was coming upon the party, and he urged the others along all he could.

"When it lands it will land on all four feet," was the way he expressed himself. "We'll do well to git into thet cave afore thet time, hear me!"

Soon the clouds were thick over the sun, and it became unusually dark for that time of day. The wind kept rising steadily until it fairly whistled through the Cross Timbers and the cedar brake below. The snow came down like so much fine sand, which struck them pitilessly as they advanced out of the hollow.

"Here she comes!" shouted Stover, of a sudden. "Come, boys, follow me!"

"But the deer—" began Dan. He could not bear to think of leaving his precious prize behind.

"We'll have to come back later for it," answered Poke. "Come, don't wait! It may cost you your life!"

His words were so earnest that Dan waited no longer, but sprang forward with all speed. Ralph and Oliver were also running with might and main. Soon they gained the top of the hollow. The entrance to the cave was two hundred yards farther on.

And now the dreadful blizzard was fairly on top of them. With a shriek like that of some demon, it hurled itself through the Cross Timbers, cutting down trees and brush as if with a sharp sword. Then it swooped down into the hollow, and the cedars went flying in all directions. The swirling snow, mingled with rain, was blinding, and for the instant Ralph felt as if he was enveloped in a cloud of finely chopped ice. He could see absolutely nothing.

"Come! Don't stop!" The cry came from Stover, and he caught Ralph by the hand. Oliver was ahead and Dan behind. By instinct the four kept in a bunch.

"I can't — I can't — go — any farther!" The gasped words came from Oliver. He was ready to drop from exhaustion.

"Don't give up — the cave is close to hand," shouted Poke, encouragingly, and as the wind abated for a few seconds, the youth struggled forward once more.

At last, just as the blizzard took a fresh start, they gained the entrance to the cave. Here Oliver

dropped on the ground panting like a dog of the chase. Poke Stover picked him up and hurried behind the shelter of the rocks with him; and in a moment more all were safe within the cave, which was as black as night.

For several minutes nobody spoke. Each sat on the stony floor trying to regain his breath. At last Dan spoke.

"My stars, but this is awful!" he burst out. "I never dreamed of anything like it!"

"It's a heavy one," answered Poke Stover. "Puts me in mind o' one I got into eight years ago. That knocked cattle right an' left."

Outside the wind was humming like a top, and ever and anon they could hear the crashing down of some mighty monarch of the forest. Even the cave was windy, and the snow and rain whirled in on them at a distance of a hundred feet from the entrance. All was pitch-dark until Stover lit a torch.

"I'm afraid my silver deer will be blown to kingdom come," said Dan, sadly. "Or else the foxes will carry it off."

"The foxes are trying to save their lives jest about now," returned Poke. "We can go after the deer jest as soon as the norther is over."

"And how long do you suppose it will last?" questioned Oliver.

"No telling that, lad; perhaps an hour, perhaps

all night. We can be thankful we are under shelter and have a bite to eat in our game-bags."

"Do you think this will strike our ranch?" went on Oliver.

"There ain't no tellin'. If it does it will certainly do some damage."

As soon as they had recovered somewhat from their scare and hard run, Ralph announced that he was getting hungry. Among their rations was some coffee and sugar, and Poke Stover had brought along a kettle and a coffee-pot. It was decided to make some hot coffee, for everybody felt chilled.

"If we only had the deer," said Dan, sadly. "We might have a first-class roast."

It was an easy matter to pick up some firewood close to the entrance of the cave, for broken tree branches lay in all directions. Soon they had a roaring fire built in the rear of the cave, where a split in the rocks overhead allowed the smoke to drift off to parts unknown.

They were just making the coffee when there came a strange clatter of hoofs on the rocks outside of the cave, and Poke Stover had barely time in which to catch up his gun when a deer appeared at the opening in front of them.

The animal was all but exhausted, and had come to the cave for shelter from the storm. Whether it belonged to the herd they had shot into or not

they could not tell, but the old frontiersman lost no time in blazing away at the game, and it fell almost at their feet.

"A deer!" cried Oliver. "Now we can have roast venison, after all!"

"Yes, and it won't go bad," answered Poke, grimly.

"I reckon the storm drove the deer here," remarked Dan. "I wonder if more are coming."

He took up his gun, and while the others set to work to skin the game he went on guard. But nothing came but a fox, and he ran off again before Dan could get a chance to fire, even if he had wished to, which was doubtful.

Soon the smell of roasting deer meat and boiling coffee spread an appetising odour through the cave, and the fire warming them up, all felt quite comfortable. Outside, the first flurries of snow had given way to hail and rain, which swept past in blinding sheets. It was, indeed, a typical Texan blizzard and one not easily forgotten.

When the meat was done, they carved it up as best they could with their hunting-knives and fell to with avidity. Besides the venison they had crackers and cheese, along with a little jerked meat, and the coffee, of which Poke Stover drank several large cups. As they ate they discussed the situation.

"We might as well remain right whar we are until morning," said the frontiersman. "We couldn't do much afore daylight, anyway."

"But I don't want to lose that silver deer," answered Dan. "If it clears off during the night I'm going out for it."

"Well, if ye do, don't ye go alone," was Poke's advice.

During the two hours following the meal they sat around the fire talking and listening to a story Stover had to tell, and also speculating on the turn of affairs between the United States and Mexico. When it came time to turn in, it was decided that each should go on guard for two hours.

"I'll take the first watch," said the frontiersman. "Dan can take the second, Ralph the third, and Oliver the fourth," and this was satisfactory to all concerned.

When it came time for Dan to go on guard, he noted with delight that the snow had given way to a gentle rain, and that the wind was going down and it was growing slightly warmer. "I'll get my deer before I turn in," he said to himself.

At the end of the two hours, he called his brother and said he was going out for the deer. "If you want, you can go along," he added.

"All right, I will," answered Ralph, readily, for he was almost as much interested in the silver deer

as Dan himself. "But what of the others? Shall we call them or let them sleep?"

"I don't believe there is any danger, Ralph, and they look so tired. Let them sleep."

Soon they were on the way, over the wet ground, which in certain spots had a crust of ice covering it. When they gained the edge of the hollow they found the deer had disappeared.

"Gone!" burst from Dan's lips, and his tone was very bitter. "I knew it!"

"Perhaps the wind shifted it," suggested Ralph. "Let us take a look around."

It was still dark, and they could see but little beyond a distance of ten or twenty feet. Dan moved off in one direction and Ralph in another.

Presently Ralph saw something dark lying just beyond the edge of the hollow, partly under a smooth rock. He stepped down on the wet rocks to investigate. It was no easy thing to do, and he tried to hold fast to the rocks above.

In a twinkle his feet slipped from under him and his grasp on the rocks loosened. Down he shot over the rocks into the hollow. He let out a yell of alarm and tried to stop himself, but could not, and went on and on, like a boy on a toboggan on a well-packed hillside. The bottom of the hollow was fully two hundred feet away, and he did not stop until the last of the descent

was passed. Then he brought up in a puddle of snow and water.

"Hi! Ralph! What's the matter?" The cry came from Dan, who now came rushing over to where he had last seen his brother.

"I'm down in the hollow!" roared the younger Radbury, when he felt able to speak.

"In the hollow?"

"Yes. I slipped and lost my grip. Take care, or you'll slip, too."

"Can you climb back?"

"I don't know yet. I'll try it."

"Did you hurt yourself?"

"Not to speak of, but I'm soaked through."

"Then you had better hurry back, or you'll take cold," returned Dan.

But hurrying back was no easy task, and the more Ralph tried to climb out of the hollow the more impossible did the task seem to become. Soon he was chattering with the cold, and his hands and feet began to grow numb.

Dan wanted to help him, but could think of nothing to do in the darkness and so ran back into the cave to arouse Poke Stover.

"Told ye to be careful," said the frontiersman when informed of the trouble. "It's a blessing he didn't break his neck."

Running to the fire, he caught up two of the blazing embers to use as torches, and followed Dan

to the point where Ralph had begun his disastrous slide.

"Ralph!" he called. "Ralph!"

To this cry there was no answer. At once Dan became more alarmed than ever.

"Ralph!" he yelled. "Ralph, why don't you answer? Ralph!"

But still no answer came back. Poke Stover shook his head dubiously.

"Must be overcome by the cold and wet," he said. "An' if so we can't git him up and to the fire none too quick!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE RETURN TO THE RANCH

"If Ralph is overcome I'm going down to him," came from Dan, after a pause.

"All right, ye can, Dan, but don't go just yet. See, I've got my lariat with me — allers do like to carry it somehow. You tie one end around yer wrist."

"That won't reach to the bottom, I am afraid."

"I know it, but it will reach part o' the distance and save ye a nasty tumble, maybe. When ye git as far as the lariat will reach ye can go the rest o' the distance alone."

In a twinkle Dan had the lariat adjusted, and then Poke Stover let him down over the edge of the hollow. Soon he was sliding without much danger. The end of the cord gained, he freed himself and slid the balance of the way on hands and knees, stopping himself just before the slush and water was reached.

"Ralph!" he called again, and now a faint, chattering answer was returned. Peering in the

darkness, he saw his brother clutching at the icy rocks, and ran to his side.

Ralph was certainly all but overcome, and he could do little for himself. He had gotten some of the icy water down his back, and this gave him a chill pitiable to behold.

Whizz! down into the hollow came one of the torches Poke had brought along, spluttering and sizzing in the rain, and Dan caught it up and looked around in the light thus afforded. Some cedar brush was handy and he thrust the torch into its midst. At first it refused to burn, but presently the wind lent its aid and the brush became a bonfire which lighted up the surroundings for many yards.

"How are ye making out?" came from Stover, after another pause.

"If the lariat was twice as long it might do us some good," returned Dan. "But as it is, I don't see how I can climb back to it, and carry Ralph too."

"Is he as bad as that?"

"Yes."

"Take him over to the fire."

Dan was already doing this. There was a flat rock beside the burning brush, and he placed his brother on this. Soon the warmth began to do Ralph good.

"Oh, Dan, what a fix to be in!" he said, when he felt able to speak.

"It is a bad one," returned his brother. "But I reckon it might be worse."

"I can never climb to the top of the hollow with that slippery ice on the rocks."

"We might walk around, if it wasn't for the darkness."

"I saw the silver deer. He lies beyond the pool of water."

"I saw him too, Ralph. But I don't care about that — just now."

By this time Stover was calling to them again. He had fastened the upper end of the lariat to a sapling growing on the edge of the hollow. Now he came down hand over hand until the lower end was gained. He had stuck a long torch in the band of his sombrero, and in the semi-darkness looked like a miner crawling around a coal pit.

Reaching the end of the lariat, the old frontiersman began to make an examination of the slippery surface below him, and then descended by a roundabout way to Dan's side.

"I reckon we can make it," he said. "Leas'wise we can try. Ralph, can you walk now?"

"I'll see," was the faint answer. The youth had crouched as close to the fire as he dared, and this had warmed him greatly. "But I don't want to remain in the cold too long."

"We won't be out long," answered Stover.

He led the way, holding Ralph by one hand

while Dan took the other. Soon they had to get down on their hands and knees.

"Hold tight to my jacket," said Stover, and began to dig into the icy ground with his hunting-knife. Dan took the hint and did the same, and thus the three at last reached the spot where hung the end of the lariat.

"Let Ralph go first," said Dan.

"Yes, you go first," added the frontiersman. "If ye tumble back we'll do our best to catch ye."

Slowly Ralph ascended. Again he began to grow cold, and his fingers became so stiff he could scarcely feel the lariat in his grasp. But he set his teeth hard, went on, and finally the top was gained and he was safe.

Dan followed and Poke Stover came close on his heels. Then without waiting to pick up the lariat all three hurried to the cave. They found Oliver had just awakened, and the youth was gazing around him in bewilderment.

"Why, where have you all been?" he cried. "What has happened?"

"I've had an adventure I didn't bargain for," answered Ralph, with chattering teeth. "Wait till I get warmed up and I'll tell you of it."

He sank down by the blaze, and Dan and Stover lost no time in building up the fire afresh, until the back end of the cave was as warm as any one would wish. The old frontiersman likewise made

some steaming coffee, and of this all partook with a relish.

"If I had remained down there much longer without a fire I would have frozen to death," said Ralph, after telling Oliver his story. "The chill seemed to go through me like a knife."

"I hope you don't get pneumonia from it," returned Oliver.

"Oh, I reckon I'll be all right now, Ollie, but I don't want another such adventure."

It was almost time for Oliver to go on guard, and this he did, leaving the others to sleep. Ralph curled up close to the friendly blaze, and his clothing drying on his body did him much good, so that at daybreak he declared himself as well as ever.

The blizzard was almost over and the sun was struggling to come through the clouds. They had a late breakfast, and then Stover went out to take a look at the surroundings. He reported it growing warmer, but declared they had best remain where they were for that day.

"Might be sech a thing as the blizzard's coming back," he explained. "And if it does we don't want to get caught midway between the cave and hum," and to this the others agreed.

Late in the afternoon, when a steady thaw had set in, the frontiersman and Dan made a détour into the hollow and brought out the silver deer,

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which had suffered but little by its tumble in the blizzard. The game was dressed with care, the head and antlers being left on the pelt.

"I want to show father what a prize he is," said Dan, with pardonable pride.

"He is a prize — no two ways on thet," rejoined Stover. "Why, I've hunted a silver deer fer years an' not got a smell o' one."

"But you might have had him, Poke," said Dan, quickly.

"Never mind, he's yours, and you're welcome to him, Dan," said the old frontiersman, heartily. His old friendship for Dan had never diminished.

The night to follow passed without special incident, excepting that several wolves came around, attracted by the deer meat which had been hung up. Oliver was on guard at the time and gained a good bit of praise from Stover by bringing one of the beasts down with a single shot from a pistol. The other wolves lost no time in disappearing when the firearm rang out.

"You'll be a fust-rate hunter in time, Ollie," said Poke. "Many a man would have missed thet critter."

"I'm afraid the wolves have done up our other deer," remarked Ralph, and he was right. On the following morning they searched diligently for the remainder of the game brought down in the hollow, but not a trace of it could be found.

The rain had now let up and the sun was shining brightly, so the journey homeward was by no means disagreeable, although, to be sure, the mud and slush lay deep in certain portions of the Cross Timbers. On the way they shot a pair of magnificent foxes, with long, bushy tails, and also a dozen or more wild turkeys and quails, and also two wild ducks.

"I'd like to spend a month in the woods," declared Oliver. "I think it would be royal sport."

"You'd get tired of it after awhile," answered Dan. "After the first excitement is over, there is lots of sameness to it. But I like to go out for a day or two now and then myself."

At the Fielding homestead they received a warm welcome. "I was afraid you were lost in the blizzard!" cried Oliver's mother. "It blew something terrible around here."

"Did it do any damage?" asked the son.

"Took part of the roof off the lower cattle-shed," said Maurice Fielding. "But we can easily fix that again."

Little Alice had been terribly frightened by the high wind. "I thought we were all going up like in a balloon!" she declared.

The Radburys and Poke Stover remained at the Fieldings only long enough to get a hot meal and then pushed on to the former's home. Mr. Rad-

bury saw them approaching from a distance and ran out to meet them.

"Save and sound! Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid you would never come back. How did you escape such an awful wind?"

"We got into a cave," answered Dan, and then continued, "What do you think of this?"

"What! the silver deer! Who brought this down?"

"I did — although the others might have shot it just as well."

"That is a great haul truly. I always wanted a silver deer myself, but could never get one. Twice I saw one when I was out on the range, but each time I hadn't my gun handy."

"Thet's just it," grinned Stover. "When the best game is in sight thar ain't never no firearm ready for to knock it over with."

The damage done by the blizzard at the Radbury range was considerable. One cattle-shed had been blown down completely, and two cows had been killed by the flying wreckage. Amos Radbury and Pompey Shuck were busy taking care of the meat of the slain animals, and at this work all of the newly arrived ones helped. The cows which had escaped from the shed had been rounded up and placed in other sheds, and Mr. Radbury concluded to let the rebuilding of the demolished structure go until spring.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE WAY TO THE MILITARY CAMP

DURING the balance of the winter months the Radburys heard but little concerning the difficulties between the United States and Mexico. For a majority of the time the weather was disagreeable, and in consequence visits to Gonzales and other towns were few and far between. Poke Stover continued to stay at the ranch, and once Oliver came down to remain a few days, and this visit Ralph and Dan returned.

In the meantime the United States and Mexico, while negotiating for peace on one hand, prepared for war on the other. In the peace negotiations, Mr. John Slidell was appointed minister plenipotentiary by our nation, and went to Mexico late in November. But when he presented himself at the City of Mexico early in December his credentials were refused recognition. He tried his best to settle the difficulty, but the war-loving General Paredes, then President of the Mexican Republic, would not listen to him.

In the meantime General Taylor established his

military depot on St. Joseph's Island, and then, reinforced by other troops of the States, including a small detachment from Texas, pushed on to Corpus Christi, on the lower side of Nueces Bay. Here a good camping spot was found, and here the Army of Occupation passed rather a tedious winter. The number of men in the camp were between thirty-five hundred and four thousand, and some of these soldiers had travelled for months to get there, for railroads there were none and all of the travelling had to be done on foot. It may be mentioned here that one detachment, consisting of seven companies of the Second Dragoons, with about fifty wagons, marched all the way from Fort Jesup, crossing the Sabine River into Texas, and then marching due west over stretch after stretch of prairies, and either fording or were ferried over the Trinity, Buffalo Bayou, Brazos, Guadalupe, and other streams.

At Corpus Christi were several soldiers from Texas who were friends of the Radburys, and they wrote letters early in February which those at the ranch read with interest.

"I would like to go to Corpus Christi camp and see how matters stand there," said Dan, after reading one of the communications.

"Let us go together!" exclaimed Ralph. "I would like the trip first-rate."

The matter hung fire for several days, and

during that time Oliver came over, and he also expressed a wish to go. At first both Mr. Radbury and Mr. Fielding demurred, but in the end they were won over, and also Mrs. Fielding, and one clear day in late February the three set out, in company with Poke Stover. Little did any of them dream at the time of the stirring military service that was to fall to their lot ere they should see home again.

All of the party were well mounted, and each carried a good gun and plenty of ammunition. The route to be taken was from Gonzales to Victoria, and then almost due south to Corpus Christi. This made a distance of about one hundred and thirty miles in a direct line, but owing to the nature of the country and the streams to be crossed, Poke calculated that they would have to cover at least a hundred and sixty miles, if not more.

Both Mr. Radbury and Mr. Fielding saw them as far as Gonzales, and all remained in the town for several hours to learn the latest news. Then without further waiting Dan and the others struck out southward, on the journey to Victoria.

In those days this portion of Texas, now dotted with towns and villages, was but thinly settled, and the party of four had not gone many miles when they found themselves in a territory which was but little better than a wilderness. To the

younger members of the party the land was comparatively strange, but not so to Poke Stover.

"I've hunted this here district over an' over," declared the old frontiersman. "I know every mile on it."

"It is beautiful land," was Oliver's comment. "It's a wonder to me the settlers don't come faster."

"The reason air because there air so many beautiful spots," answered Poke. "It's hard decidin' where to go to stay."

"That is true," came from Dan. "I know how it was when father came out in his prairie wagon. Time and again he stopped and thought to settle, and then he would push on, hoping to find something still better."

"But I like our home fully as well as this, if not better," put in Ralph, quickly. "To me the lay of our land is just right."

"Right ye air, Ralph," said Poke; "an' thet's what your father was a-lookin' fer when he sot down to make his livin'. Your ranch is all right."

So talking they rode on, taking their time, for they were in no particular hurry to get to their journey's end. On the way they roused up a number of wild birds, and Oliver, anxious to show how he had improved in shooting, brought down several of them, and these they cooked over their camp-fire when they rested at noon.

The country around them was certainly beautiful, and several times one or the other called a halt to inspect the outlook. On one side rolled the sparkling river, in a flood tide which overswept the bank and made the water murmur in the bushes and reeds growing close by; on the other were the rolling prairies, with the tall grass bending one way and another, according to the gentle breeze that was blowing. Close to the river was a continuous stretch of trees and bushes, with the well-worn trail running in and out among them. Some of the trees were exceedingly large, and they had to pick their way carefully over the gnarled roots. Across the stream, in the dim distance was the blue haze of the mountains.

Nightfall found them close to the ranch home of a settler named Cardell, and here they determined to put up until morning. Poke knew the settler well, and quickly introduced the others. Mr. Cardell had once met Mr. Radbury, and told all of them to make themselves at home.

"Yes, I reckon we are in for a war," he said, while he was helping them care for the horses. "I heard only this morning that General Taylor may march against the greasers at any time now."

"Is that so?" cried Ralph. "Well, I hope he doesn't start before we get to Corpus Christi."

"Want to go with him?"

"I would just as lief," was the quick reply. "But I don't know as he'll have me."

"You could join the Texan volunteers — goodness knows there will be enough of 'em going."

"I was thinking of that," answered the younger Radbury.

"Hang me ef I don't go into the war myself if it really comes!" ejaculated Poke. "I kin feel the war fever a-b'ilin' in me already!" and at this quaint way of putting it all the others had to laugh.

That night several others stopped at the ranch, including two soldiers of the regular army, who had been off on a furlough. The soldiers had many stories to tell about their fighting with the Indians, and to these stories all listened with keen interest.

"Well, so long as our army is under the generalship of Old Rough and Ready we'll pull through all right," said one of the soldiers. "I fit with him in Florida, an' I know. He'll go through or bust, mark my words."

"The greasers are a treacherous lot," said the other soldier. "I wouldn't trust one of 'em out of my sight, not for a minit. I've had lots of dealings with 'em, and they did their best to swindle me every trip!"

"If they go to war they will be badly beaten, no doubt of that," remarked Henry Cardell.

"But if war comes, I sincerely trust it does not reach the city of Monterey, in Mexico."

"Why?" asked Dan.

"I have a sister and an older brother there, interested in a mining venture. They are having no easy times with the greasers as it is. If war should strike that city it would be likely to go hard with them."

"I should think they would leave Mexico," observed Oliver.

"No; my brother is just bulldog enough to hold on, and my sister does not care to leave him. He would die rather than allow the Mexicans to confiscate his mine, which he thinks will prove valuable."

The night passed without special incident, and early in the morning our friends struck out for Victoria, the soldiers leaving them, to ride in the direction of Goliad.

"If you get the chance, stop here on your return," said Henry Cardell to Dan, on parting. "I would like to hear from you how the military camp looks."

"I will stop," said Dan. Cardell had refused to be paid for the accommodations he had given the party, and they were very thankful to him for his generosity.

The character of the country now changed somewhat, for the rains had been frequent, and

large sections of the river bank had been inundated thereby.

"Ye want to be careful o' the trail," cautioned Poke, who generally rode in advance. "This is treacherous ground in spots."

About half the morning was passed, when, on looking down the stream, Oliver and Ralph both discovered a beautiful deer, drinking his fill at one of the pools under a clump of trees.

"Let us try for him!" shouted Oliver, and dashed off at the full speed of his horse.

Ralph was as eager as his friend, and soon they were speeding along side by side, with Poke Stover and Dan calling vainly for them to come back.

"They won't git thet deer," snorted Poke. "He sees them already. He must be dreadful thirsty, or he'd be gone long ago."

"Now Oliver can shoot pretty good, he's crazy to bring down everything he sees," returned Dan. "And I must say Ralph is about as bad."

"Wall, I reckon ye war crazy ter shoot, too, a few years ago," laughed the old frontiersman. "Perhaps ye don't remember it, but I do," and he chuckled to himself.

Soon the two younger members of the party had passed out of sight. A minute later two shots rang out on the air. A silence followed, and then came a sudden and unexpected call for help.

CHAPTER XIII.

DIFFICULTIES OF THE TRAIL

So anxious were the two youths to get the deer that each tried his best to gain the lead in the mad chase.

By pure luck Oliver got slightly ahead of Ralph. But coming to a split in the trail he knew not which road to take. He turned to the right, while Ralph turned to the left.

While they were all of a hundred feet apart, both caught sight of the deer again. The animal was now bounding across the prairie with lightning-like leaps. Without hesitation both fired. But the deer was too far away, just as Poke Stover had surmised, and neither shot reached the quarry.

Anxious to obtain another shot if possible, Oliver plunged on, without noticing the treacherous nature of the ground beneath him. Then of a sudden his horse went down with both fore legs, pitching the youth fairly and squarely over his head.

As he went spinning through the air, Oliver let out the cry for help heard by Dan and the old

frontiersman, as well as by Ralph. The next instant the youth felt himself sink in a mixture of water and mud, flat on his back.

He had been thrown into a treacherous morass, of the kind Poke had warned all against, and for the moment he scarcely knew what to do. But as the dirty water reached his mouth, he struggled to rise, and finally managed to get into something of a sitting position. But to stand upright was out of the question, for the pasty mud stuck to his lower limbs like so much glue.

"Help! help!" he called, lustily. "Help!"

"What's up?" yelled Ralph, who was the closest to him. "Did your gun explode?"

"No, but my horse threw me into a hole and I can't get out!" panted Oliver. He had struggled so that he was almost exhausted.

Ralph soon came closer, but with care, for he readily saw that the ground for several rods around was far from safe. In the meantime the horse Oliver had been riding began to plunge and kick, and at last freed himself from his trying position and sped on down the river trail.

As soon as they were able to do so, Dan and Poke Stover reached the vicinity.

"What's wrong?" questioned the elder Radbury of his brother.

"Oliver is in a mud-hole and can't get out."

"'BRACE AGAINST THIS TREE, AND PULL EASY LIKE AT FUST.'"

"All of you be careful," put in Poke. "This ain't no easy matter ter deal with, hear me!"

They dismounted, and tied their horses at a convenient spot. Then they moved forward by leaping from one clump of bushes to another. At last they were within five yards of poor Oliver, and that seemed as close as they could get to him.

The youth was certainly the picture of misery, with dishevelled hair, and with the dirty water streaming over his face and neck. Dan was inclined to laugh, but the seriousness of the dilemma checked him.

"For gracious sake, somebody help me out of this," groaned Oliver. "I'm stuck here worse than a fly on fly-paper."

"Don't try to move yet — ye'll only sink deeper," cried Poke. "We'll throw you a rope."

He picked his way back to his horse and got his lariat, which hung from the saddle. When he returned he threw one end of the rope to Oliver, and told him to adjust it under his arms.

"Now come over here with me," continued the frontiersman, to Dan and Ralph. "Brace against this tree, and pull easy like at fust, otherwise somebody may git hurt."

They did as directed, Poke assisting, and soon the lariat was stretched as tight as a string on a bass fiddle. Still Oliver did not budge.

"Oh, let up!" he shrieked at last. "You're cutting me in two. Let up, I say!"

They let up, and the two Radburys looked at the old frontiersman in dismay. What was to be done next?

"He's stuck worse nor I expected," grunted Poke, thoughtfully, and with a shake of his head. "Must be reg'lar glue thar. We'll have ter try a different game."

He walked away from the morass, and in the meantime Dan tied the outer end of the lariat around a tree, so that Oliver might not slip deeper into the pasty ooze. Oliver continued to ask for immediate help, for the cord cut deeply into his sides, directly under the arms.

At last, Poke Stover found what he was looking for, a small tree which the storms of the early winter had blown down. He called Dan and Ralph to him.

"If we kin git thet log over to him, reckon it will be a big lift fer him," he observed. "I'll chop off thet main branch. The others we'll have to leave on, otherwise she'll sink in the mud, too."

The branch pointed out was soon detached with the sharp axe the party carried, and then began the task of rolling the tree trunk just where they wanted it. It was hard work, and made the three perspire freely. But all of them had rolled logs

before, so it was not as difficult as it would have proved had they been novices at the task.

"A leetle closer," cried Poke, presently. "Jest a leetle more! Now, be steady! To the right, Ralph! Throw the end around, Dan. Now, over onct more! Steady! There she goes! Oh!"

The last exclamation came because of a splashing of the tree trunk which covered the entire party with spots of dirty water. It also caused a shower to descend over Oliver, who gave a yell, thinking the end of the tree trunk was going to hit him.

"Don't crush me!" he spluttered. "Take care!"

"It ain't so close as thet," answered Poke, wiping the dirty water from his face. "I didn't calkerlate it would go over quite so quick," he explained. "But it's a good job done."

He crawled out on the tree trunk with care and tried to get hold of Oliver's hand. But the distance was a little too great.

"Let us try to push the tree trunk closer," suggested Ralph.

"We can't budge it, now it's in the mud," answered his brother. "Let us bring the lariat around."

This was done, and Oliver was asked to place the rope partly under his knees. Then all hauled away again, standing up on the tree trunk and holding fast to the upstanding branches.

The purchase was now a proper one, and with a loud sucking noise the unfortunate Oliver came up from the bed of the morass. As soon as he was free he made a wild clutch for the end of the tree limb, and in a few seconds more he was safe.

The whole party now sought firmer ground, taking the two horses with them, and while Dan went off to look for the steed that had run away, the others helped Oliver to clean his clothing, and dry himself at a fire which they started.

It was no easy matter for Dan to find Oliver's horse. The sinking into the edge of the morass had frightened the animal, and led him to leave the trail and plunge straight for the open prairie.

"If he's feeling fresh he'll go for miles," thought Dan. "But I must catch him, for we can't go on with one horse shy, and poor Oliver has suffered enough as it is."

The recent rains had left the ground soft, and the fresh hoof-marks were plainly to be seen. Soon the belt of timber running parallel with the stream was left behind, and he came out into the warm sunshine. There was a little brook not far away, leading to a hill which arose from the prairie like a hump half a mile distant. Toward this round hill the runaway horse had gone. At present he was nowhere in sight.

Moving over the prairie with care, so as not to get into the holes of the numerous small animals

to be found in that territory, the elder Radbury at last gained the edge of the hill, which was fringed with mesquite bushes. Here he paused to make sure that he was on the right trail, then rode onward to the other side of the hill.

As he came up to a patch of timber, he heard loud talking, and presently caught sight of two men who appeared to be in a warm dispute over something.

"Hank Stiger and Big Foot the Comanche!" he exclaimed, to himself. "What in the world can they be doing here?"

The characters he mentioned were well known to him, as they are to those who read the first volume of this series. Hank Stiger was a half-breed who had in years gone by caused the Radburys much trouble. He had once stolen some valuable papers from the ranch, and later on tried to blow up the cabin with gunpowder. But he had been caught, after Poke Stover had shot him in the knee, and his criminal career had been cut short for the time being. Of late years Dan had seen but little of the man, and had heard that he was dead.

Big Foot was a Comanche Indian who had been more or less friendly to the Radburys ever since the family had located upon the Guadalupe. He had once exposed Stiger, and he had also done Ralph a great service when the youth, then a boy

of tender years, had been a prisoner of the Mexicans at San Antonio. But after that Big Foot had departed for the west, and his appearance in this locality filled Dan with curiosity.

"Something is wrong here," murmured the young man to himself, and then passed behind a clump of bushes with his horse. Soon he had dismounted and, gun in hand, was moving cautiously forward to where the ill-assorted pair were disputing. As he drew closer he saw that Big Foot had his hands behind him and that Hank Stiger stood with a pistol in his grasp, and the weapon was pointed at the Indian's heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DROVE OF WILD HORSES

ALTHOUGH Hank Stiger was a half-breed he spoke but little of the Indian tongue, consequently the conversation was carried on in bad English on his part and even worse English on the part of Big Foot. They were in the midst of a hot argument, and for several seconds Dan could not get the drift of the matter.

"I know your game," Hank Stiger was saying. "I've seen sech doing before. Tell de truf, Big Foot, or I'll shoot you!"

"Big Foot has told Hank truf," came from the Comanche. "Big Foot tell all he know."

"It ain't so, dat ain't!" cried Stiger, passionately. "You were over to Wallace's las' night."

"No, Big Foot at Gonzales — sell deer dare."

"It ain't so, I say! You were hangin' around Wallace's. You ain't goin' back on me, remember dat! Shall I shoot?" And Hank Stiger raised the pistol, which had dropped a trifle.

The Comanche shrugged his shoulders and said nothing to this. He was as brave as the average

Indian, and, like nearly all of them, did not believe in showing any fear, no matter what the state of his real feelings.

"So you hev got dat twenty dollars," went on Hank Stiger, after a pause. "If you ain't you hid it somewhere."

Again Big Foot made no answer. But he looked around anxiously, as if calculating his chance to escape.

"I want you to give me the money, do you hear dat?" almost shouted Hank Stiger, working himself up into a rage. "What does an Injun like you want with twenty dollars, anyway? You'll drink it up in two days."

"Hank drink um up in one day," ventured the Comanche, with a scowl.

"No, I won't — I want to buy something at Victoria. The money is mine, too — Wallace promised it to me."

Again Big Foot remained silent, and again he looked around. Then of a sudden he caught sight of Dan, who had crept up until he was directly behind Hank Stiger.

A white man would have betrayed himself by a change of countenance, but the Indian remained as passive in looks as ever. Yet he fully recognised Dan, and he felt that he had a friend at hand, for he knew in what estimation Hank Stiger was held by the Radburys.

At once Hank Stiger let out a torrent of abuse, and stepping back a pace, he took careful aim at the Indian's head. He was evidently beside himself with rage, as well as half full of bad liquor. He was about to fire when Dan rushed in and knocked up his arm. The pistol was discharged, but the bullet merely cut the air.

"None of that, Stiger!" cried the young man, and clasped the half-breed around the chest, pinning his arms to his side. Instantly Big Foot bounded forward and began a fierce struggle for the pistol, which he soon wrenched from Stiger's grasp.

"Dan Radbury!" spluttered the half-breed, as he caught sight of the young man's face over his shoulder. "Le — let me go!"

"Keep quiet, Stiger," commanded Dan. "If you don't I'll let Big Foot shoot you."

"This ain't your quarrel — let up — or I'll kill somebody myself!" went on the infuriated wretch. "Let up, I say!" and he began to swear in a most horrible fashion.

But Dan held him tight, and now Big Foot came closer and placed the muzzle of the pistol at Stiger's head. The contact with the cold metal caused the half-breed to shiver, and without warning he collapsed, and then Dan knew that resistance was over, at least for the time being. As soon as he could he deprived Stiger of his hunting-

knife. Then, fearing that Big Foot would shoot even with Stiger subdued, he made the Comanche give up the pistol to him.

"Now sit down, both of you, and tell me what this is all about," he said, as sternly as he could.

In a rambling sort of way Stiger told his story, to the effect that a settler had promised him twenty dollars for rounding up some cattle. He said he had done the work with a little aid from Big Foot, but that the Indian had collected the money entirely for himself.

Then Big Foot told his story, which was an entirely different version. He said the settler had promised them ten dollars each for the work, providing the cattle were all rounded up. He had done his share and gotten his ten dollars. Then Stiger had gone off on a spree and the settler had promised the Indian ten dollars more if he would finish up the work begun by Stiger. This he had done and he had met the settler afterward at Gonzales, while selling some deer meat there, and had gotten a settlement. The settler was very bitter at Stiger for getting drunk and for ruining a pony by riding him too hard in the attempted round-up, and had told Big Foot that he had met the half-breed and told him that he was not to have a cent more under any circumstances than the two dollars paid in advance.

"Big Foot no got him twenty dollars," concluded the Comanche. "Big Foot work for money and git him. Stiger no work, Stiger get drunk, no find cattle, most kill hoss, Wallace big mad, he send Stiger away. Stiger drink more, come after me. Want Big Foot to give money for more drink. Big Foot say no, he more mad, den much mad, and want shoot."

Dan felt that Big Foot was telling the truth, for Stiger had the appearance of one who had been on a prolonged spree, with his half-closed eyes, his bloated and inflamed face, and his clothing which was torn and covered with dirt.

"I believe you, Big Foot," he said. "And I believe Stiger would believe you, too, were he sober."

The latter words were put in to mollify the half-breed, but Stiger was in no condition to appreciate them.

"The money's mine," he muttered. "It's a shame to side wid him, Radbury!"

"I have never known Big Foot to be dishonest, Stiger."

At this remark the half-breed scowled more viciously than ever, for he knew that the young man might have added that he had known Stiger to be very dishonest.

"Den I don't git no money?" he demanded, abruptly.

"Not unless Big Foot wants to give you some."

"Goin' to give me back my knife and pistol?"

"Will you promise to leave Big Foot and myself alone if I do?"

"Yes."

"Big Foot no give Stiger a cent," put in the Comanche. "He drink more, and him too much drink now."

"I don't blame you, Big Foot."

"Stiger shoot um give pistol," went on the Comanche, warningly.

"I'll empty it first," said Dan, and proceeded to do so. Then he handed the pistol and the knife to Stiger.

"Now march," he commanded. "And don't you dare to look back this way, or I may be tempted to take a shot with my gun," and Dan picked up the weapon, which he had stood against a tree.

Stiger hesitated a minute. "Go along wid me?" he queried of Big Foot. "Show you a big time, and we'll bury the hatchet. I know where we can get some fine wild hosses — seen 'em yesterday."

But Big Foot shook his head. "Big Foot done wid Stiger," he said. "No more work togedder — bad t'ing," and he shook his head again.

Without another word Hank Stiger stalked off. As Dan had commanded, he did not look behind

him, and presently he was lost to view across the rolling prairie.

"Big Foot t'ank Dan for what um do," said the Comanche, stepping forward suddenly and shaking the young man's hand. "No will forget, never!" he added, earnestly.

"I am glad I chanced along, Big Foot," returned Dan.

"What bring Dan here?"

"I and some others are on our way to the military camp at Corpus Christi. We lost a horse — he got away — and I am looking for him. Have you seen him anywhere around — a white horse with a black patch on his fore leg?"

"Big Foot see horse running dat way. Come, um show Dan."

But before they could move, Poke Stover came riding rapidly toward them. He had heard the pistol-shots, and at a distance had seen Hank Stiger making off across the prairie, and now he wanted to know what it all meant.

"Hullo, Big Foot!" he cried to the Comanche. "You're round ag'n. Thought as how you had passed in yer checks long ago."

"Ugh! Big Foot got much right to live as um Poke Stover," returned the Comanche.

"Certain ye have, Big Foot, an' I'm glad to see ye a-looking so good. You're one o' the few good Injuns left, I take it."

Stover turned to Dan. "Who was that skedaddling away?"

Dan told of what had occurred, and Poke at once said he "reckoned as how he war right to side with Big Foot." But he added: "You keep an eye peeled fer Stiger. He's a snake in the grass, if ever there was one."

"Yes, um snake," said Big Foot. "Um big drunk snake, too," he added, and wondered why Stover laughed.

They told the Comanche where they had left Ralph and Oliver, that he might walk over and tell them what had happened, and then they set out for the missing horse.

"He's gone a smart spell by this time," remarked the old frontiersman, as they galloped over the rolling prairie. "I reckon by the time we round him up we'll have to go into camp for the night."

"Well, time is no object, so there is no use of complaining, Poke. Only I hope we get back to Ralph and Oliver before we turn in."

"Oh, I reckon we can do that, unless the runaway is too all-fired frisky."

They went on for at least two miles without seeing anything more of the horse than the fresh tracks in the prairie grass, and then Poke remarked that he must have been "uncommon frisky," after all. "I thought he looked played

out when Oliver was a-ridin' of him," he added. "But that's whar I missed my guess, eh?"

They had now come to another round hill, with the usual fringe of trees and bushes. Here there was a spring of water, and they stopped to get a drink. As they were finishing they noticed Dan's horse growing strangely agitated.

"Hark!" cried the young man. "Poke, what does that mean?"

Both listened, and made out a curious snorting, coming from the opposite side of the hill.

"Wild hosses!" ejaculated the old frontiersman. "Didn't know as how any of 'em was in this neighbourhood."

"Let us have a look at them!" cried Dan. "Have you got your lasso? Perhaps we can bag one of them."

Poke had the lasso, and without further words they leaped into the saddle.

A ride of a few minutes took them to the other side of the hill, and there they saw a sight which held them almost spellbound.

Twenty or more wild horses were to be seen, beautiful in form, and full of life and action. In the midst of the group was Oliver's horse, and the wild horses had attacked the domesticated animal and were trying to bite it to death.

CHAPTER XV.

UNCLE SAM'S SOLDIER BOYS

"POKE, did you ever see such a scene in your life before?" gasped Dan, when able to speak. "See how vicious they are! They will tear Ollie's horse to pieces!"

"Wild hosses ain't got no use fer a tame hoss, Dan," answered the old frontiersman. "Come!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Save Ollie's hoss fer him. He's wuth more than a wild one — to us."

So speaking, Poke Stover urged his own horse forward. At first the beast was inclined to shy to one side, but the old frontiersman had his well trained, and presently he went forward with a rush, and as he did so Poke discharged his pistol, aiming at the horse that appeared to be making the most vicious attack upon Oliver's animal.

Seeing this, Dan also took a shot, and the wild horse went down, badly wounded. But it was not killed and an instant later it arose and began limping off.

The shots, and the falling of their leader, brought consternation to the other wild horses, and as Poke and Dan came riding straight toward them they broke and scattered. Then began a wild stampede, and in a minute more the drove was bounding over the rolling prairie at a break-neck rate of speed, with the wounded animal limping on behind. Oliver's horse started as if to follow, then turned, and moved slowly toward Dan, trembling in every limb and with the blood flowing freely from a bite in the flank.

"We might have had a putty good round-up, if we had been out fer one," remarked Poke, after the excitement was over and the drove was almost out of sight. "Some putty good hosses thar."

"Poor horse!" murmured Dan, referring to the bitten one, and dismounting, he patted Oliver's steed on the neck and rubbed his nose. The horse seemed to understand, and gave a pleased brush against him, as if for further protection.

"We can't do much with the wound," said the frontiersman, after an examination. "It don't appear to be very deep, and I reckon it will soon heal."

"It's queer how scared he was," remarked Dan, while they were riding back to where they had left the others. "And yet Ollie told me that he wasn't afraid of the worst bull they have on the ranch."

"Thet's the way of a hoss, Dan; nothin' scares 'em worse than to git back among their own kind, arfter they have been tamed an' broken. They seem to think the wild hosses will be ashamed of 'em, or something like thet."

It did not take long for them to gain the river, and here they found that Ralph and Oliver had gone into temporary camp. Big Foot had arrived and was bringing in some wood for the fire. The Comanche had told his story, and now Dan related what had followed.

"Oh, what a shame!" cried Oliver, when he saw his wounded steed. Then he hugged the horse around the neck and something like a tear stood in his eye, for the youth was very tender-hearted. It was not long before he washed the wounds and tended to them as much as his limited means allowed. Here the Indian's knowledge of medicine came in. He brought in some wild roots, crushed them between two flat rocks, and told Oliver to sop the sap from them on the wounds.

"Werry good him," said Big Foot. "Make sores well quick," and his words proved true, for the wounds began to heal that very night.

The Indian remained with them to sleep, but departed early in the morning. He said he was going over to Goliad, but would perhaps meet them at Corpus Christi.

"Brudder tell me soldiers at Corpus Christi like go shoot," he explained. "Big Foot go dare, take out um hunting party two dollar one day — make some money maybe."

"That's an idea," laughed Ralph. "And two dollars a day is cheap, if you show them something worth shooting."

"Show hunter soldiers two dollars' worth of him big game," grunted the Comanche. "No show four dollar for two dollar, no. Make um hunting-grounds las' long time, him two dollar one day," and he looked blankly at them, the Comanche way of inferring that he had said a good thing.

Dan roared outright. "You're cute, Big Foot," he said. "For two dollars per day you'll give 'em two dollars' worth of hunting and no more. Well, I reckon that's square, but its pretty close to the line. At two dollars' worth of hunting per day I reckon the hunting-grounds will last a couple of centuries or so," and at this the others joined in the laugh.

In the morning all felt refreshed, and the journey toward Victoria was resumed. Nothing of special interest happened, and by nightfall they found themselves in the place, which at that time was little more than a thriving village.

All were anxious for news from the seat of war, as people began to term it, but there was very little that was new to tell, excepting that the

Mexicans were strengthening their army at Matamoras.

"General Taylor will have to march against them soon," said one of the leading men at Victoria. "If he doesn't they will march this way and make it rather lively for us."

"I think they'll be pretty slow about attacking the United States," answered Dan.

"Oh, I don't know. They are a hot-headed lot, you must remember."

The party remained in Victoria one night, putting up at a tavern well known to Poke Stover, a place in direct contrast to the hotels now to be found in the interior towns of Texas. The place was a long, low, two-story affair, with rooms which were barely furnished and with a parlour which was such only in name. The main room was the bar-room, with its thickly sanded floor and its gaudy prints strung along the walls. This was crowded night and day, and betting and gambling were never wanting. It made the Radburys sick to even look into such a resort, and they stayed away, and so did Oliver. Poke went in, but did not remain long.

"Arfter the pure air of the river and prairies thet foul terbacker smoke is enough ter make a hog sick," was the way the frontiersman expressed himself. "How them fellers kin sit thar an' drink, gamble, an' swap yarns, is more'n I kin figure out.

But they do it, an' some of 'em won't come away until their last red cent is drunk up," and in this Poke spoke the truth, for in those days drinking was ten times more of a curse than it is to-day in these parts.

From Victoria the party struck out due south for Refugio, another small village, midway between Victoria and Corpus Christi. There was promise of rain in the air, and they lost no time in getting over the road, having no wish to be caught in a belated "norther." Some of these "northers" had been very severe upon the troops at Corpus Christi, blowing down the tents and driving the water from the gulf over a portion of the camping ground. But this was not an unmixed evil, for after the water went down many hollows around camp were found filled with stranded fish and turtles, and the soldiers had turtle soup and fish dinners to their hearts' content.

On the way to Refugio they fell in with half a dozen men of the regular army, and the ride was enlivened by stories of army life, to which Oliver and the Radburys listened with keen relish. As the soldiers told these tales they were very alluring, and Oliver said so, after the regulars were gone.

"You mustn't believe all you hear, Ollie," said Poke. "Take it with a mighty grain o' salt is my motto. They told ye the nice things an' allowed

the dark things to take care o' themselves. Wall, in real life the dark things don't take care o' themselves so easily — ye hev got to take care o' 'em, or bust."

When Refugio was reached it was raining in torrents, and they were glad to seek the shelter of a ranch kept by a man whom the old frontiersman knew well. This man had also met Mr. Fielding and Mr. Radbury, and he gave them all a warm welcome. He was, however, from Vermont, and bitterly opposed to the war.

"It simply means the extension of slavery and nothing else," he said. "If the Southerners knew that Texas was to become an anti-slave State after the war, there wouldn't be a single Southerner go to the front."

"Maybe they will divide Texas into two States, for and against slavery," suggested Dan, and this was by no means a new idea or one of his own.

"No, they won't divide the State that way. If they divide at all it will be into several slave States, so that the South can hold the balance of power against the North."

The rain that night was heavy, and in the morning they found themselves unable to go on, because of the water and mud on the trail. But it cleared up by night, and the next day they set off early. That night found them at the old ranch of Red Waters, as it was then termed, which they found

crowded with soldiers who had been off on a grand hunt and had come in with several deer and wild birds innumerable. With these soldiers they made themselves at home, and so got something of a taste of camp life before the actual camp was gained. Twenty-four hours later found them at Corpus Christi, and more than eager to take in all that was going on.

CHAPTER XVI.

GENERAL ZACHARY TAYLOR

"WHAT a beautiful sight!"

Such were the words which burst from Ralph's lips as he and the others caught their first view of the encampment of the United States army at Corpus Christi.

The exclamation was one not to be wondered at, for the encampment was certainly one of the most beautiful which ever fell to the lot of any army. Here was an immense level of thick grass fronting the bluish waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Between the level and the water was a long stretch of sandy shore, with here and there a bar of white pebbles. Far to the westward were rolling hills and immense forests, filled with game of a hundred kinds. For a long distance the level was dotted with the white tents of the soldiers, while further on were the wagons and horses and the artillery belonging to the army. Soldiers were to be seen everywhere, in companies and battalions, for it happened just then to be company and battalion drill. The cavalry was also at drill, and came

rushing over the plain at a breakneck speed, while from a distance came the occasional notes of a bugle, or the rattle of a drum corps and the shrill screaming of fifes.

"It certainly is fine," answered Dan. "My, how soldierly they do look! See those fellows marching, just as if they had ramrods down their backs. They cut a much better figure than we did when Texas was fighting for her liberty."

"Thet's true," put in Poke. "But I allow as how they won't be able to fight better nor did the men under old Sam Houston at the battle o' San Jacinto." To Poke, and to a good many others for the matter of that, that battle of San Jacinto was the most wonderful on record.

All were anxious to get a closer view of the camp, but a soldier, riding by, advised them to remain where they were for the next hour.

"We are going to have a grand parade soon," he said. "And you'll be able to see all the infantry and cavalry, and see General Taylor and the other officers, too."

"All right, then we'll stay right where we are," answered Dan, and the others agreed. They were on a slight knoll, and had tethered their horses to a lonely tree standing there.

Soon the company and battalion drills gave way to regimental drills, and then the drums and bugles

began to call the commands together for the grand parade. Out of the officers' tents poured the leading general and his staff, and mounted the steeds brought to them. Then the grand parade began, and they watched it with breathless interest, as more than three thousand soldiers marched to and fro over the vast plain.

"There is Old Rough and Ready!" cried Poke, pointing with his hand. "I tell you he's a born fighter if ever there was one."

All looked in the direction and beheld General Taylor astride of his favourite horse. They saw a well-built man who was a trifle over sixty years of age. He had a determined but not an unkindly face, and eyes which could look one through and through. He was dressed in the full military regalia of the times, but he made no effort to "show off," as Oliver had expected he might.

Gen. Zachary Taylor was indeed, as Poke had said, a born fighter, and had well earned the title of Old Rough and Ready. He was born November 24, 1784, on a plantation in Orange County, Virginia, being one of several children that first saw the light of day in a wild neighbourhood which even now is but sparingly settled. Before Zachary was a year old, the family emigrated westward to the banks of the Ohio River, and settled close to what is to-day the city of Louisville, Kentucky.

The early days of the future President of the United States were full of peril. Many were the fights which the settlers had with the Indians and with wild animals, and when young Zachary was sent to school, sometimes several miles from home, he was cautioned to keep his eyes open for both two-footed and four-footed enemies, and he did.

Although young Zachary had the hope of being a soldier, his father made him remain on the farm, while the oldest son of the family obtained a much coveted army commission. Until he was twenty-three years old did the future President cut down trees, plough the soil, plant and reap, but at the same time he did not neglect his further education.

At last his dream of an army life was realised, but not exactly in the manner he had anticipated. His brother William, then a second lieutenant of artillery, died, and Zachary was appointed to fill the vacancy, receiving a commission as first lieutenant of the Seventh Infantry from the hands of President Jefferson. He reported at New Orleans for duty, and two years later became a captain.

The War of 1812 with England was now on, and some of the United States troops were needed in the great Northwest to keep back the Indians, who thought that now was the proper time to strike back at the settlers, when they were having

their hands full with their white brothers from across the sea. In this campaign Zachary Taylor fought bravely, and was soon given command at Fort Harrison, on the Wabash River. The Indians made a fierce attack on the fort, but were repulsed with severe loss. Taylor was kept in the Northwest until 1814, and did so well that he was warmly commended by General Harrison, who himself became President shortly afterward.

From the Northwest the young soldier, who was now a major, was sent to several places, including Fort Jesup, which was built under his supervision in 1822. He had now gained a name as an Indian fighter, and ten years later he served as a colonel in the Black Hawk War. During this war he showed not alone his daring, but also his regard for strict discipline, as the following anecdote will show.

The colonel had with him some regular United States soldiers and some volunteers. While on the trail of the Indians, the volunteers refused to cross a certain river, saying that they were volunteers, and as such could not be called upon to leave their own State to engage in war in the Indian country.

To this argument the commander at first said nothing. A halt was made on the river bank, and Taylor sent back to headquarters asking for advice on the disputed question. During the

night word came back to follow Black Hawk to the end.

In the meantime the mutiny, for it can be called nothing less, increased, and early in the morning a meeting of the volunteers and their sympathisers was held, at which several speeches were made concerning State rights, as the question was called. Presently Colonel Taylor was requested to present his side of the question.

The commander's answer was short and to the point. In a few words he told them what a regard he had for them as fellow citizens, and how, as fellow citizens, they might rank higher than himself.

"But," he added, impressively, "the word has been passed on to me from Washington to follow Black Hawk to the end, and to take you with me as soldiers. I mean to do both." Here he drew himself up to his full height, and eyed them with a sternness that left no room for further dispute. "There are the flat-boats drawn up on the shore, and there are Uncle Sam's soldiers drawn up behind you on the prairie. You will move forward without further delay." And they did move forward, in a hurry; and that was the end of the mutiny so far as it concerned Zachary Taylor's troops.

For a number of years the Seminole and other Indians of Florida had made life unbearable for

the inhabitants, and in 1836 Old Rough and Ready was ordered to that State. A long and arduous campaign on the Kissimmee River followed, which brought to Taylor an important victory over the red men at Okeechobee. For six weeks the troops marched and fought through the Everglades, in water sometimes up to their knees, with sickness and disease on every hand. For his brilliant services in Florida, Taylor was appointed a brigadier-general by brevet.

General Taylor remained in Florida a considerable time, but the work was too hard for any man to stand long, and at last he asked to be relieved, and this permission was reluctantly granted, and he was transferred to Fort Jesup, to have, as a department commander, several of the Southern States under his care. In the years to follow he shifted from one fort to another, and thus the time was passed until he was called upon by the United States authorities to take up the campaign against the Mexicans on the Rio Grande, that campaign which was to prove the hardest and yet the most brilliant of his life.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CROSSING OF THE COLORADO

THE grand parade was a revelation to our friends, who had come so many miles to view the camp of the soldiers, and Ralph, Dan, and Oliver were highly enthusiastic over it.

"Never saw anything like it in my whole life!" declared Ralph, as company after company marched by, with drums beating, bands playing, and the glorious stars and stripes floating in the breeze. "I declare, I feel like joining them on the spot!"

"You can't join the regulars so easily," said Dan, but with a thoughtful air, for he, too, was absorbed in the sight. "They'll put you through a regular course of sprouts first."

"Well, I reckon I could stand the examination, Dan."

"I think we could all stand that," put in Oliver. "I don't believe they are so particular in time of war. They'll want men bad enough."

"Texas has promised one thousand volunteers," said a horseman, who had ridden near them, also

to watch the grand parade. "You fellows can easily get in that crowd if you wish."

"Hurrah! then we're in it!" cried Ralph, impulsively. "I'm a volunteer from this minute!"

"And I am with you!" cried Oliver, "that is, unless my folks put up too much of a kick against it," he continued, sobering down.

"If I go, I shall go with the Rangers from our neighbourhood," said Dan. "I know most of them, and I'll feel more at home than I would among strangers."

So the talk ran on, and the stranger who had come up added to their store of knowledge concerning the troops to be furnished by Texas. By the time the grand parade was over they knew all they wished to know about enlisting, and then they obtained permission from one of the officers to inspect the camp at closer range, and moved down between the long rows of white tents, to where the artillery and horses were located.

"Hullo, boys," was the sudden cry, and looking to one side they saw George Nolan hurrying toward them. "Sure, an' where did you come from?"

"Came from home, to see the soldiers," answered Ralph. "But what does this mean? What are you wearing soldier clothes for?"

"Sure an' haven't I j'ined the army," answered Nolan, in strong Irish accent, and with a grin

on his expansive face. "It's meself that couldn't keep away, wid so much fightin' in sight. Says I to myself, says I, 'George, you can't stay home wid so many greasers to be taught a lesson,' says I. 'You must do your juty,' says I. 'J'ine the sodgers at onct,' says I, 'and the nixt day I sot out, an' here I am, a sergeant in Company C of our battalion of Texan volunteers.'"

"I'm glad to hear it!" cried Ralph. "I'm going to join, too!"

"And so am I — if they'll take me and the folks are willing," put in Oliver.

"Sure an' I reckon most all av the stout-hearted laddy-bucks are j'inin'. Phat of yourself, Dan?"

"Are any of our Rangers here?"

"Sure they are — over beyond the curve av the gulf, — Bob Morrell's crowd, an' Wolf Bradley, Si Quiggs, an' all thim."

"Good! I'll go over and see them."

"That crowd will be a regular mounted volunteer company," called Nolan after Dan, as the latter rode off, followed by Poke Stover.

Soon Dan was among a number of old friends, and learned that many others were expected in a day or two. He was already attached, as we know, to the Rangers, and was warmly welcomed by the captain, who had fought with the Radburys at the battle of San Jacinto.

"Of course we want you, Dan," he said, in his

easy, familiar style, quite different from the style of the officers in the regular army. "And we want you, too, Poke."

"I'm with Dan," answered the old frontiersman. "Whatever he does I'll do. I promised his father to keep an eye on the boys," and he laughed broadly, realising that Dan was no longer the boy he had been in those never-to-be-forgotten days when Texas was struggling for liberty.

Presently Oliver and Ralph came along, and all hands were invited to remain to dinner, and accepted.

"We're getting fish by the wholesale out of the gulf," said one of the Rangers. "Never saw better fishing in my life — nor boating either. The boats are out every day, and sometimes the soldiers get up boat races, to help pass the time away."

"Have you any idea when you are going to move forward?" asked Oliver.

"We won't stay here much longer, I reckon. The greasers are massing a big army at Matamoras, and Old Rough and Ready won't give them the chance to march into Texas, you may be sure on that."

Our friends remained in camp for the balance of the day, and when they left, the head of each of the younger members of the party was in a whirl.

"How different from the old times!" remarked Ralph. "How some of those uniforms shine!"

"Yes, Ralph, but that doesn't make the men any better soldiers," returned Dan.

"I know that."

"No soldiers can fight better than did ours at the fall of the Alamo and at San Jacinto. If the troops under General Taylor do as well it will be an honour to them."

"What a fine-looking soldier General Taylor makes!" came from Oliver. "His rough and ready appearance just suits me. He'll make the Mexicans hustle when he gets after them." And so the talk ran on until they retired.

Two weeks passed swiftly, but space will not permit me to relate all the things which happened in that space of time.

Suffice it to say that the Radburys sent word home that they were going to join the troops from the State of Texas. Oliver asked for permission to join, and this was granted after Mr. Fielding had come on to see his son. Oliver and Ralph were to be together, in one company, while Dan was in another. After some hesitation, Poke Stover joined the scouts, or spies, of which there were fifty or more.

General Taylor had been waiting for positive orders from Washington to move forward, and at last the orders came, and everything was made

ready for a start. Part of the expedition went by water, including a battery of field-guns and a siege train, under the command of Major Monroe; all the other went by land, under the command of General Taylor himself. The advance of the boats was to be regulated by the progress made on land.

The breaking up of camp was a busy time for all, including our friends, who had now donned regular soldiers' uniforms and who were quite proficient in drill. Many came to see the army off, and the start was made with bands playing and with the general aspect of a holiday. Even with hunting and fishing, the stay at Corpus Christi had become wearisome, and the soldiers, especially the regulars, were impatient to be "up and doing," as they expressed it.

The camping place had been a lovely and favourable spot, but rapidly the character of the country began to change. The richly covered prairies gave place to a soil not unlike ashes, in which the feet sank at every step, and in which but little grew but a wiry grass that was distasteful to both horses and cattle. Here and there the Spanish bayonet flourished, covered with whitish blossoms and full of points as sharp as needles. In the dim distance could be seen dwarfed trees and bushes, trying their best to keep a foothold and live in that forsaken district.

"If this is the territory that is in dispute, I think it's a mighty poor bit of ground to quarrel over," remarked Ralph, as he rode along by Oliver's side. "Why, I wouldn't give a cent an acre for it!"

It was not long before the army began to suffer from thirst, and then, as they advanced over the long stretches of barren sand, one and another would discover what looked like a lake ahead, with bushes and shady trees. Alas, when the spot was gained, there would be the same sand, burning with sunshine, and then the soldiers would discover that they were the victims of a mirage. And when a stream was reached it was generally found to be so salt with water from the gulf that to drink the liquid was out of the question.

But these hardships were not to last long. The army had left Corpus Christi on the 11th of March, and nine days later the advance under General Taylor reached the vicinity of the Colorado River. Here a small party of Mexicans were met, and they warned the United States commander not to cross the stream, or the army would be fired upon.

At once our soldiers were drawn up in battle-array, and a good deal of subdued excitement arose, for many felt certain that the first battle of the war was now at hand. Yet all were eager to go ahead. But this was not so easy, for the

banks of the Colorado at this point were twenty feet high, and a road had to be made leading to the water's edge.

"We'll make the road and go on," said the commander, and the work began at once, while the Mexicans began to sound bugles far up and down the stream, to give the Americans the impression that a large force was gathering at that point. Our artillery was at once brought up and placed in position, and the port fires were lighted, for in those days the artillerymen had to have lights with which to discharge their pieces.

At last all was ready for the advance, and four companies of artillery, under the command of Captain C. F. Smith, rushed down to the ford below. Every one expected a deadly fire from the enemy, but it did not come, and then the command hurried across the ford, under the leadership of General Worth, and mounted to the opposite shore of the Colorado. Here it was discovered that the Mexican camp behind the chaparral and trees was deserted. The enemy had fled toward the Rio Grande, and a first battle was thus postponed for some other day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOISTING OUR FLAG ON THE RIO GRANDE

"HUMPH! we didn't get much of a fight that time," said Ralph, after the excitement was over.

"No, and I was all primed for a big tussle," returned Oliver. "Where do you suppose the greasers are? Lurking in the bushes?"

"That's to be found out."

It was to be found out, but it did not take the scouts, including Poke, to learn the truth of the matter, — that the few Mexicans that had been in the vicinity had departed in the direction of Point Isabel, a port on the gulf, but a few miles north of the mouth of the Rio Grande.

The advance of the army was now in four columns, across the prairies, with three columns moving almost directly toward Matamoras and the fourth in the direction of Point Isabel. The face of the country now became more productive, and the grass teemed with animal life, which included many snakes, among which were rattlers of no mean size.

The rattlesnakes were a constant source of

terror to the soldiers and to the horses and cattle, and the shooting of them went on continually, although the soldiers were ordered not to waste their ammunition.

Late one afternoon the company to which Ralph and Oliver were attached came to a halt in a small grove of stunted trees, where there was a tiny spring. Here the soldiers got a drink and watered their horses, the steeds being in sad need of something with which to relieve their thirst.

While the watering was going on, Oliver sauntered beyond the grove, and was standing surveying the landscape to the westward, when without warning a huge rattlesnake came gliding toward him through the grass, and wound itself about the legs of both of the young soldier's boots!

So quickly was the movement executed that Oliver could do nothing to help himself. He tried to run, but with both legs fast he pitched headlong, and the rattlesnake then proceeded to wind itself higher up on his body.

It was now that the young soldier found his voice and began to yell in a manner that would have done credit to a savage. At his cry, half a dozen other soldiers answered him, including Ralph.

"What's the matter, Fielding?"

"What are you making such an awful racket about?"

"'SHOOT HIM! HELP!' OLIVER CONTINUED TO CRY."

"Do you want to let the greasers know we are coming?"

"A snake!" yelled the young soldier. "A big rattler, and he has me around the waist. Help!"

At the mention of a rattlesnake each of the soldiers made a grab for his gun, and in a twinkle they came leaping toward Oliver, with Ralph among them. In the meantime Oliver was trying to catch hold of the tail of the reptile, but without success.

"Shoot him! Help!" Oliver continued to cry, and several raised their weapons. But to get a good aim was not easy, for the rattlesnake was constantly shifting its position, and none of the soldiers wished to wound their young comrade.

In the midst of the excitement a lieutenant of the command came forward. He had a sword at his side, but for the moment did not think to use it.

"Won't you use the sword, lieutenant?" asked Oliver, and instantly the officer brought the weapon forth. But even to use the sword was not easy, and the lieutenant had as much of a dread of the rattlesnake as anybody.

The snake was now evidently as excited as the soldiers, and instead of striking at Oliver it twisted its beady eyes first on one man standing near and then another. Oliver was now desperate,

and of a sudden clutched the snake by the neck, directly behind the head. As soon as he made this movement the rattler unwound itself from his body and shifted its coils to the young soldier's neck!

The situation was now more than desperate, for although Oliver could hold the rattlesnake's head from him, he could not release himself from that whip-like body which was slowly but surely strangling him. The lieutenant sprang forward with the sword, but made a false stroke, cutting Oliver a slight gash in the shoulder. At the same instant one of the soldiers fired at close range, and another fired over the lieutenant's shoulder, and this made the officer drop the sword and step back in a hurry, for he was afraid he would be hit instead of the snake.

When some of the smoke lifted, it was seen that Ralph had picked up the sword and was close to Oliver's side. "Don't fire — I'll fix him," cried the younger Radbury, and almost before anybody realised it he was sawing away at the snake's neck, directly behind the spot where Oliver held the reptile. Fortunately, the blade was tolerably sharp, and soon the head dropped to the ground, and as it did so down went Oliver, all but strangled to death.

Even yet the struggle was not over, for the body of the rattlesnake still clung to Oliver's

neck, and it was all Ralph and the others could do to disengage it. But now the soldiers flocked around, and willing hands at last tore the snake loose and pitched it into the grass. Then Oliver was carried to the spring and given every attention. He lay insensible for quarter of an hour, and when he came to was so excited that a doctor had to be called to give him something for his nerves.

"Oh, what an ugly thing!" he said, with a shudder, when talking it over with Ralph later on, "I'll never forget it as long as I live!"

"It's an experience nobody would like to fall into," answered Ralph. "But I was afraid of something of that sort ever since the rattlers became so numerous, and Tom Mallory found one in his knapsack the other morning. I tell you a fellow can't be too careful out here. We have more enemies than the greasers to fight."

"I'll be careful after this, never fear," went on Oliver. "I won't take a step without looking ahead, and as for sleeping—" He finished with a shudder. It was a good week before he got anything like a sound sleep again.

Several days after leaving the Colorado River, the army, or rather a portion of it, gained the trail running from Point Isabel to the Rio Grande at a point opposite Matamoras. Learning that no Mexicans were about in force, General Taylor

ordered the main army to halt, and then proceeded to Point Isabel with his dragoons and his supply-train.

When nearing the town the United States commander was met by a Mexican prefect, who came forward to protest against his occupancy of what the prefect termed Mexican territory.

"I am ordered to the Rio Grande, and shall proceed there," was the general's answer. "I will give you my further answer when opposite Matamoras." The prefect wished to argue the point, but Old Rough and Ready would not listen.

Suddenly a column of smoke was seen to be rising in the direction of the town, and it was realised that the prefect had contrived for a delay. General Taylor would not allow this, and some troops were ordered forward. They went with a rush, and most of the buildings were saved. Then the train and dragoons took possession, and the boats belonging to the Americans arrived at about the same time.

As the main army approached the vicinity of the Rio Grande, there was a great change in the face of the country. The ground was more rolling, and covered with better grass, brush, and trees. Occasionally large herds of cattle were seen, with here and there a few wild horses.

"The Rio Grande is a fresh water river," said Poke to Dan, as they rode along one day. "So

we won't suffer for water any more." And for this Dan and all the other soldiers were thankful.

At last came the time, early in the morning of the 28th of March, that the Army of Occupation came within sight of the great river which was henceforth to mark the boundary between the United States and Mexico. It was a welcome sight, and many a weary soldier, after his struggle over the desert left behind, felt like raising a cheer. Fig, orange, and pomegranate trees were plentiful, and along the richly verdured bank of the stream were beautiful gardens belonging to Mexican señors of more or less importance.

That our army was expected was evinced by the people of the city of Matamoras, who crowded the shore opposite. In the distance could be seen the flag of Mexico, and without delay a flag-staff was erected on the northern shore, and the stars and stripes were run up, one military band in the meanwhile playing the "Star Spangled Banner," and the other "Yankee Doodle."

"Now they have got to fight or do something," said Dan, as he watched proceedings with deep interest. But there was no fight, and the army went into camp as before.

The raising of the United States flag on the bank of the Rio Grande angered the Mexicans very much, and without delay a messenger was sent to General Taylor with a demand that the

banner be hauled down. To this the commander replied that the flag was flying there by order of the United States, and there it would stay. This answer made the Mexicans furious.

"We will see if it remains there," said one of their generals. "It shall be cut down, if we have to wade knee deep in the blood of the Yankees to do it!" Such talk was extravagant; still, the Mexicans were determined to rout our army if they could.

The Rio Grande immediately in front of the city of Matamoras winds around in the form of the letter S, and on the river bank the Mexicans had erected several forts and mortar batteries, extending from one end of the S to the other.

On arriving at the river General Taylor first made his headquarters near the bend below the city, in front of which was a building, later termed the Old Guard House. The flagstaff was planted in the bend directly opposite Matamoras, and a battery of two bombs was placed in front of it. Around the flagstaff was begun the erection of a fortification which was afterward called Fort Brown, on the spot where the city of Brownsville now stands.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STRUGGLE WITH A SPY

FOR several days nothing of a warlike nature occurred, and Ralph and the others settled down once more to the ordinary routine of camp life. Yet there was much to interest the young soldiers, for a coming "fight" was in the air. Moreover, many traders came into camp, from Matamoras and elsewhere, and they generally had something of interest to relate.

No doubt the majority of the traders were honest, but among the people coming and going were several spies, as was afterward learned. With one of these spies Dan had an experience fully as thrilling as the experience Oliver had had with the rattlesnake.

The young soldier had been sent to headquarters on an errand for a superior. It was just at dusk, and the clouded sky gave forth every indication of a rain. He was carrying a bundle which was not large but quite heavy, and was taking his time about it.

As he passed a clump of mesquite he heard a

strange noise coming from a tree behind the bushes, and looking over his shoulder caught sight of a note-book as it fell from the tree into the thicket below. With the falling of the note-book came a mutter of a Spanish voice, instantly hushed as the speaker noticed the proximity of Dan.

"Hullo, what is that fellow doing up yonder tree?" thought Dan. But it did not strike him at the time that the man in the tree might be a spy, and he walked on without stopping to pick the note-book up.

But he had hardly gone on a hundred feet when he suddenly changed his mind and turned back. He was in time to see a fellow in the garb of a Mexican horse trader lowering himself into the mesquite bushes. Then the man began to feel around for the note-book, which he soon picked up and slipped into his breast pocket.

"Hullo! What are you doing there?" demanded Dan, coming as close as the nature of the chaparral would permit.

At this the Mexican shook his head slowly, meaning that he did not understand English. Then, as Dan could speak a little Spanish, picked up since his boyhood days, he repeated his question in that language.

"I was only resting," answered the Mexican.

It seemed a lame excuse, and Dan became more suspicious than ever.

"Resting?" he repeated. "A fine place for you to rest — in sight of General Taylor's headquarters."

"I brought over a horse," said the Mexican, glibly, recovering somewhat from his dismay over being discovered. "I had hard work to sell him. I was very tired, and I climbed into the tree to take a nap before going back."

Dan looked the fellow straight in the eyes, and came to the conclusion that he was lying. What to do he hardly knew, but he made up his mind that the Mexican should not get away until he had undergone a search. Perhaps the note-book might be a stolen one.

"Come out here," he said.

"What does the young soldier want of me?

"I want to see what you have about your person."

"I am an honest trader!" cried the Mexican, but his face grew dark as he spoke.

"Perhaps; but I want to search you. Or else you can go to headquarters with me."

This alarmed the Mexican still more, and he begged Dan not to report him, saying he was afraid the *Americanos* would hang him, they were such a bloodthirsty lot.

"Let me go and I will give you two dollars," he added, and pulled the Mexican silver coins from his pocket.

"No, I am not that kind," replied Dan, angrily. "And I want you to come here at once. If you don't I will call the nearest guard."

"No! no! I will come out," said the Mexican, and began to pick his way out of the mesquite bushes to the level grass behind the tree. At once Dan followed him to the spot, throwing down his bundle as he did so. Something warned him to beware of this stranger.

"Now show me that note-book you just picked up," went on Dan, and caught the Mexican by the arm.

"It is of no importance," insisted the other, and attempted to back away.

"Show it to me, or I will call the guard. Do you know what I think? I think you are a spy!"

At these words the Mexican started. Then he looked around swiftly, to see if anybody else was in sight. The coast was clear, and with the swiftness of a panther he leaped upon Dan, clutched him by the throat, and bore him to the ground.

As we know, the young soldier was partly on his guard. But he had not expected such a lightning-like attack, and for the instant he was stunned. Then he realised what was taking place and squirmed to free himself, at the same time trying to call for assistance. But his cries were cut short by the hand at his throat.

"Silence!" hissed the Mexican. "Silence, or I will kill you on the spot!"

As he spoke he tried to draw a stiletto from his breast. But Dan saw the movement, and realising what it meant, — probably death, — he caught the hand before the dagger could be withdrawn from the Mexican's clothing. Then over and over rolled the pair, at first toward the bushes and then out on the prairie grass.

The rain was now beginning to fall, and this made the day darker than usual, so that no one a hundred yards from the spot could see what was going on. The Mexican was strong and he was also desperate, and the clutch on Dan's neck was like that of a vise.

At last both of the contestants began to grow weaker, Dan especially so, for he had not been able to draw a fair breath since that first leap at him. But he had managed to bring his knee well up on his chest, and now he let out with his foot and gave the Mexican a prodigious prod in the stomach.

This movement was a success, for with a sharp cry of pain the rascal dropped his hold, staggered to his feet, slipped, and fell backward. Dan wanted to follow up this advantage, but for the moment could do little but gasp for breath. He let out the loudest cry possible under the circumstances and stood over the Mexican.

It took the enemy but a few seconds to regain his feet. Then, hearing voices on the other side of the bushes, he started to run.

But Dan's blood was up, and he was now satisfied more than ever that the fellow was not what he had pretended to be. He ran after the Mexican and caught him by the shoulder.

Instantly the fellow pulled the stiletto from his breast, and the bright steel was brandished over the young soldier's head.

"Let go!" said the man in Spanish. "Let go, or I will strike!"

But now the voices were coming closer, and Dan let out another cry. Then the stiletto came down, but the young soldier leaped back and the blow was of no avail.

Two soldiers of the guard now came into view, each with a gun. Again the Mexican started to run, but Dan put out his foot, and in his excitement the fellow pitched headlong in the grass.

"What's up here?" demanded one of the guards.

"Arrest that man!" panted Dan. "He was going to kill me with his knife!"

"The dirty greaser!" ejaculated the guard, and promptly aimed his weapon at the Mexican's head.

In a moment more the three were around the fellow, just as the latter was concealing the stiletto in his breast. He begged to be let go, and again affirmed that he was only a horse trader and had

meant no harm, and that he had only pulled the stiletto to scare Dan.

The guards listened to his story and then turned to Dan, who promptly related the incident of the note-book and what had followed.

"I reckon you have made a haul," said one of the guards, when Dan had finished. "We'll take this fellow to headquarters, anyhow."

Dan picked up his bundle once more, and the party of four set out for headquarters. The Mexican did not wish to go, but there was no help for it, for the guards would have shot him down at the first sign of resistance.

At headquarters the Mexican was turned over to the officer of the day, for this appeared an unusual case, and again the fellow told his story. Then he was searched, and as the note-book was taken from him he tried to tear out several of the pages and destroy them.

"No, you don't!" cried one of the guards, and got the pages from him. They were examined and they proved to contain well-drawn maps of the camp with the officers' tents all marked.

"A spy, if ever there was one!" cried the officer of the day, and, after another close examination of the Mexican's clothing, he was led away to the guard-house. He gave his name as Jose Manguel, but it is doubtful if this was correct.

Just after the examination was concluded, Gen-

eral Taylor came into headquarters, and he was told of what had taken place. At once he summoned Dan before him. The young soldier went in and saluted in his best military style. General Taylor looked him squarely in the face.

"I am pleased to have one of my men do his duty so thoroughly," said General Taylor. "The capture of this spy is of importance." And after a few more words Dan was dismissed.

Later on Jose Manguel was ascertained to be a well-known Mexican police officer, and it was thought by all that he would be hung according to the rules of war. But the Mexican government made a strong plea in his behalf, and when the war was almost over he was let go on parole. What became of him after that our friends never learned.

CHAPTER XX.

BOMBARDMENT OF FORT BROWN

General Arista had now arrived to take charge of the Mexican army gathered at Matamoras, and he at once opened negotiations with General Taylor, stating that the Americans must leave the vicinity of the Rio Grande, or operations would at once be begun against them. This was what had been told to our commander, and he paid no attention to the communication further than to hasten the work upon Fort Brown and otherwise strengthen his line of defence. To meet the enemy was his desire and the desire of all the soldiers under him. In fact, old veterans have often said that at this period of the campaign all of the regulars and many of the volunteers were fairly "spoiling for a fight."

Hostilities were not long in commencing. General Arista sent twenty-five hundred men across the river in two parties, one above and the other below the American camp, the intention being to cut off General Taylor's communication with his base of supplies at Point Isabel.

To ascertain the truth concerning this movement General Taylor sent out a Captain Thornton with twenty-five men. This body advanced about twenty miles up the stream. While at a farmhouse surrounded with a chaparral fence, the reconnoitring party was attacked by several hundred Mexican cavalry under General Torrejon.

"We must fight for it, boys!" shouted Captain Thornton, as soon as he realised the danger of the position. "Come, follow me!" And at a single bound he cleared the high chaparral and made off through the Mexicans like the wind.

A number of the soldiers tried to follow, but the only man to get over the fence was shot down on sight. The command of the party now fell to Captain Hardee, and he, after some resistance, was compelled to surrender, otherwise every soldier of the Americans would have been butchered. In the meantime, Captain Thornton was followed, and, his horse going into a sink-hole, he was captured when still five miles from our lines.

The Mexicans claimed this first brush as a grand victory, and a regular celebration followed in Mexico City and other large places. Of course the Americans were much chagrined, and those in camp were more anxious than ever to measure strength with their foes.

In the meantime, another contest of even greater importance was taking place elsewhere.

Point Isabel as a base of supplies for our army was now a place of much importance. It was guarded by several warships in the harbour and by two companies of artillery under the command of Major Munroe. There were also some volunteers in the place, principally men from Texas and Louisiana.

Among the volunteers was a body of Texan Rangers, under the command of Captain S. H. Walker. They arrived at Point Isabel just as the port was threatened with an attack from the advancing arm of the Mexican army. At once the Rangers rode out to meet the Mexicans, but being met with an overwhelming force, they, after a short fight, were compelled to retreat.

It was now imperatively necessary that General Taylor know of the condition of affairs at Point Isabel, and as the line of communication was closed, Captain Walker volunteered, with six of his men, to make a dash for the vicinity of Fort Brown. This involved great risks, but the mission was accomplished, and the true state of affairs explained to General Taylor.

There now remained but one thing to do, and that was to meet the enemy in open battle and fight him, no matter what the cost. How large the Mexican army was there was no telling, but it was certainly larger than that of the United States by several thousand.

The fort was left in the command of Major Jacob Brown, who had under him a regiment of infantry and two companies of artillery, about five hundred men all told. The balance of the army, under the direct command of General Taylor, took up the march for Point Isabel.

Among the soldiers left at the fort were Dan and Poke Stover, the latter staying there by special permission. Ralph, Oliver, George Nolan, and our other friends moved with the main army, so for the time being the two Radburys were separated.

"Take care of yourself, Ralph," said Dan on parting with his brother. "Cover yourself with all the glory you care to, but don't get shot."

"And don't you get shot," returned Ralph. Then a general hand-shaking followed, and those to march on Point Isabel were off.

The movement to the Point by General Taylor was taken by General Arista for a retreat, and a proclamation was issued to the Mexicans to that effect. Then, as soon as the army was on the way, the enemy turned their attention to the destruction of Fort Brown, being confident that the place could be captured with ease.

With the departure of General Taylor the work on the fort went forward with increased rapidity. Each company of soldiers was given something to do, and each soldier was assigned to his particular place on the parapet in case of attack.

"Didn't reckon on fightin' with a pick an' shovel, did ye?" remarked the old frontiersman to Dan, when the pair were at work placing sod on a high embankment.

"Not exactly," replied Dan. "But as it's a part of my duty I sha'n't complain, Poke. Do you think they'll attack us soon?"

"More'n likely, now that Old Rough and Ready is away. I calkerlate they think they'll have an easy time with us, too."

"What do you think?"

"I think it will depend altogether on our soldiers. If they fight as they should, reckon we can hold our own."

"I trust it isn't another Alamo, Poke." And Dan could not suppress a shudder at the remembrance of that terrible massacre, where every one in the mission had been butchered.

"We mustn't let it be another Alamo, Dan. If I've got to fall I intend to fall fighting."

So the talk ran on, but it was not allowed to interfere with the work, which went on night and day. There were also drills, and a double guard was kept the whole twenty-four hours of the day and night.

General Taylor had marched away on the 1st day of May, 1846. On this day and the next the fort was not molested, but on the morning of the 3d the Mexicans opened with a battery of seven

guns, and shot and shell were hurled over and around the stronghold in all directions.

"We are in for it now!" cried Dan, as he and Poke watched the various effects of the shots which came near. Of course the soldiers in the fort could do but little. The artillery opened, however, with vigour, not alone on the Mexican battery, but also on Matamoras. So true was the aim of the Americans that in twenty minutes after the firing began one of the Mexican guns was struck by a ball and knocked off its carriage, severely wounding those who had been manning the piece.

At this time the "curtain," as it was called, to the flanks of the north and east bastions of the fort was not completed, and men were sent out in the midst of the firing to go on with this necessary bit of labour. The rising parapet was a dangerous spot, and Poke warned Dan to be careful about exposing himself, and the young soldier heeded his advice all he could. A little while later a cannon-ball came booming toward the parapet.

"Down!" shrieked Poke to Dan, and both fell flat. The cannon-ball struck a sergeant of the regulars in the head.

"Sergeant Weigert is dead!" was the cry, and several rushed forward to pick up the body. The dead man was carried to the hospital tent, located on the south side of the fort enclosure. Here he

was being placed on a cot when a shell burst through the roof of the tent, tearing it to pieces, and killing several who lay within wounded.

Dan was among the number detailed to help erect a new hospital tent, and the sufferings of those who had been hurt was horrible to contemplate. In the meantime the bombardment kept on, but no further damage was done, and at last the firing ceased. Comparatively speaking, but little damage had been done on either side, yet the Mexicans bombastically hailed it as another substantial victory.

The bombardment was distinctly heard by the soldiers under General Taylor, and the commander became at once anxious to learn the particulars of what was occurring. Accordingly he sent back Captain May with a hundred men, and Captain Walker with ten of his Rangers, to learn the news.

The party got as close as possible to the fort, and then Captain Walker, with a picked escort, moved cautiously to the very walls of the fort itself. The captain was recognised and helped across a deep ditch on a ladder. When received by Major Brown he was told that the fort had suffered little, and was as able to hold out as before. With this news Captain Walker attempted to get back to Captain May's party, but was blocked by the Mexicans, and had to wait until the next

night. In the meantime Captain May himself returned to Point Isabel. Captain Walker followed, twenty-four hours later, and his news was received with much satisfaction by the commanding general. A list of the killed and wounded had been brought along, and Ralph and Oliver were glad to learn that Dan and Poke were not mentioned on it.

Two days after the first attack on the fort, large bodies of Mexican soldiers were discovered to the north of the defence. Here the enemy had erected a battery during the night, and when daylight came this battery opened vigorously, and so did the batteries on the other side of the Rio Grande, so that Fort Brown was subjected to a terrific cross-fire from front and rear.

"We are going to catch it now!" cried Dan, as he took his place at the parapet. "They mean business."

"Well, we mean business, too," answered Poke, who was not far off. "We didn't come down on the Rio Grande to play."

The battle of artillery was in full progress when suddenly a body of Mexicans, numbering at least two thousand, appeared on the vast plain to the rear of the fort. This was accepted as a challenge by Uncle Sam's troops, and several companies issued from the fort to meet them. But the Mexicans did not dare to charge, and presently with-

drew, having no desire to become acquainted with the Yankees' cannon at closer range. They fell back to the spot where General Taylor had had his headquarters, and manned the ditches he had dug for its defence.

The night to follow was an anxious one to those in the fort. Many of the soldiers were wounded, and among them Poke, who had received an ugly scratch on the left shoulder. Ammunition was far from plentiful, and the gunners were cautioned to make every shot tell. In the meantime sleep was out of the question, and every soldier remained at his post.

In the morning the bombardment began again at daybreak, and soon shot and shell burst in and around the fort with increased fury, smashing things generally, and setting fire to several tents and sheds. As before, the infantry could do but little, for the Mexicans kept their distance, yet Dan and the others were busy caring for the hurt ones, and putting out the conflagrations.

At last the guns in the fort ceased to reply to those from without, for the gunners were ordered to keep the remaining ammunition until an assault should be made. The Mexicans now surrounded the enclosure on all sides, and as the American guns stopped they felt sure that victory was close at hand.

"If we could only go out and engage them!"

said more than one of the regulars, but this was not to be, as Major Brown had been ordered by General Taylor not to make any sally unless as a last resort. If too hard pressed he was to fire an eighteen-pounder as a certain signal, and this eighteen-pounder was soon after fired.

The day brought forth the mortal wounding of Major Brown, which cast a deep gloom over those under this gallant soldier. The command now devolved upon Captain Hawkins, and to him General Arista sent a communication asking him to surrender, and stating that all prisoners would be treated well. This the captain declined, and the bombardment went on once more, far into the night, the shrieking shells making darkness more than hideous.

The morning came with added gloom to the Americans, who were worn out by watching and by dodging the shots and shells which had all but wrecked the large fort. Nearly every man had suffered, either from the shots direct, or from the flying sand and splinters. Yet on the face of each was a grim determination to stick to the post until the end. A few times during that day the bombardment ceased, but then it burst out with renewed vigour. Then came the sixth day of the attack, and again the cannon belched forth at sunrise, as though they knew not the meaning of a let-up.

"Something has got to give way soon," said Poke, to Dan. "They mean to wear us out if they can." To this Dan did not answer, but he, too, wondered how that awful bombardment would end.

CHAPTER XXI.

BATTLE OF PALO ALTO

GENERAL TAYLOR had received the word sent to him by Major Brown, through Captain Walker, but word was also brought to him, later, of the heavy firing in the direction of the fort, and he again became anxious concerning the welfare of that garrison.

On the evening of the 7th of May he left Point Isabel, taking with him the larger part of his command, and also a train of two hundred and fifty wagons and carts, and started back for Fort Brown. The soldiers numbered about three thousand, and attached to his artillery were ten yokes of oxen, drawing siege carriages, carrying two eighteen-pounders! Of cavalry there were less than three hundred.

The army made but eight miles that night, but it had gotten a good start, and at dawn of the day following it moved on once more, and did not halt until about midday.

"The Mexicans are at hand!" was the sudden cry, which ran from company to company, and it

was true, the enemy having been discovered in considerable force a long distance ahead. At first it was thought they were in line for battle, but this was an error, and they did not form for the fight until the great plain known as Palo Alto was reached, — a level stretch of prairie backed up by tall timber, which had given to the spot its name.

"My, what a sight!"

It was Ralph who uttered the words as his company came out upon the level prairie, and he viewed the scene before him. There, as on a vast carpet, was the Mexican army, drawn up in battle array, over a mile long. Cavalry, artillery, and infantry stood side by side, with banners glittering brightly in the sunshine, and with bugles blowing in defiance. It was truly a scene for the eye of a painter.

And now orders came thick and fast from General Taylor and his aids. The right wing, under Colonel Twiggs, was composed of the Fifth Infantry, Major Ringgold's artillery, the Third and Fourth Infantry, two eighteen-pounders, and some detached regiments. The left wing, under command of Lieut.-Colonel Belknap, was composed of some artillery under Lieut.-Colonel Childs, Duncan's Light Artillery, and the Eighth Infantry. Near the centre were the dragoons, under Captains May and Ker, the latter having the wagon-train under his special protection.

The battle now to take place was one not to be easily forgotten, especially in these days, when hand-to-hand conflicts are speedily becoming a thing of the past. On this great plain there could be no hiding, no dodging, hardly a manœuvring for a better position. The fight was to be like the fights of old, and blows were to be given and taken at close range.

While the armies were preparing for the onslaught a lieutenant of the Americans was seen to ride rapidly to the front, and then from one end of the Mexican line to the other, with almost the speed of the wind. This was Lieutenant Blake of the Topographical Engineers. The Mexicans tried to catch him, but failed, and in a very few minutes he had supplied General Taylor with a fairly accurate account of the number of the enemy, and how they were located.

"That's what I call nerve," said Oliver, when it was learned what the engineer had accomplished. "Wonder what those greasers think of that?"

Any reply that was forthcoming was drowned out by the sudden booming of a battery on the right of the Mexican line, and ball and grape-shot were hurled over the heads of Uncle Sam's soldiers, as they advanced in dead silence through the thick prairie grass. Almost instantly the other pieces of the enemy "took up the chorus,"

and the noise became deafening, and huge clouds of smoke began to roll over the battle-field.

When less than seven hundred yards intervened between the two armies the Americans came to a halt. Then our eighteen-pounders boomed forth, and shortly afterward Ringgold's Battery swept into the centre of the open prairie, along with Duncan's Light Artillery, and a rapid fire began, which soon tore great gaps in the enemy's ranks.

For two hours the field-pieces on both sides kept up their thunderous din, and the prairie was torn up as by ploughs run mad. As the smoke grew thicker the Mexican cavalry prepared to make a charge. Fifteen hundred men came riding forth, and yelling and cheering bore down upon the Fifth Infantry, which had been formed to receive them. The first fire of our infantry brought many down, but the rest came on, and soon a terrific hand-to-hand struggle was on. Then more of the American troops came forward to the repulse, and the battle waged more furiously than ever.

"Forward!" It was a cry to advance from the captain of the company to which Ralph and Oliver were attached, and in a minute more the two young soldiers, side by side, were moving over the deep prairie grass at a double-quick.

"Down with the greasers!" was the cry. "Hurrah for Uncle Sam!" And on went the

company, through a cloud of cannon smoke. Then of a sudden came the command to halt and fire.

Crack! crack! crack! spoke up the guns, and then and there Ralph and Oliver fired their first shots of that war which was to bring them so many perils in the near future. It must be confessed that Oliver was both pale and nervous. Ralph had seen a battle before and was more contained.

Soon the cracking of guns and the roaring of cannon was incessant, and but little could be seen because of the heavy clouds of smoke sweeping over the prairie in all directions. Prairie grass fires were by no means wanting, and soon those around the wagon-train had their hands full trying to keep the supplies from being burnt up.

Presently the battle-ground was shifted, and now the artillery played again the more important part. The eighteen-pounders rushed onward and occupied the very ground which the Mexican cannon had covered two hours before, the ox-teams puffing and blowing as though doing a most laborious work on a farm.

The Fifth Regiment advanced to the extreme right of the newly formed line, and once again the crack of musketry sounded out, from one end of the battle-field to the other. It was now growing late and the Mexicans tried frantically to regain

the little ground they had lost. But it could not be done.

Ringgold's Battery had thus far done noble work and was working harder than ever, when Major Ringgold was shot in the thigh, dying shortly afterward. He was a well-known and well-beloved soldier, and his death cast a momentary gloom over his command.

In the meantime Duncan's Battery was by no means idle. From one end of the battle-field it dashed suddenly, through the heavy smoke, to the other end, and then upon the very head of the Mexican infantry moving to a new position to the strains of a fine military band. Quickly getting into position, the battery let drive a hail of canister and shell. The first discharge struck the band, cutting nearly all the musicians to pieces! The Mexicans rallied and continued to come forward, but again the battery went at them, and at last they were forced to retreat to the chaparral behind the battle-field.

"What a fearful noise!" exclaimed Oliver, while loading his gun. "I never heard such a racket in my life."

"I reckon we'll get used to it," answered Ralph.

Again the company moved forward, and now the young soldiers found themselves in the very thickest of the battle. All around them the

soldiers were dropping. But they stood their ground and fired whenever ordered to do so.

"It can't last much longer — the sun is going down," said Ralph, presently. "Look! the greasers are going back!" he added.

"I see they are," answered Oliver. "But they have not stopped firing."

This was true, and presently, through a cloud of smoke, they saw a Mexican battery starting to pour a last lot of shot in their direction. Again the young soldiers pushed forward, but were soon ordered to halt.

"It's pretty close — " began Oliver, when boom! one of the enemy's cannon spoke up. The ball was coming their way, and Ralph felt the wind as it rushed past him. Then he turned to where Oliver had been standing, and he was horrified to see his chum go down and lie in the grass like one dead.

CHAPTER XXII.

FIGHTING AT RESACA DE LA PALMA

"OLIVER!"

The cry came straight from Ralph's heart, as, throwing down his gun, he rushed over to his chum and raised him up. He could not make out where Oliver had been hit, but that he was injured was certain, for his face was deadly white, his eyes closed, and his heart had almost ceased to beat.

"Knocked out, eh?" came from a soldier standing by. "Too bad! He looked like a clever chap, too!"

"He was my closest friend!" returned Ralph. "Oliver, can't you speak to me?" he went on, earnestly.

But Oliver never answered and Ralph grew frantic. He turned to his superior. "Captain, may I carry him to the rear?"

"Yes; the fight is over," was the welcome answer, and while the Mexican battery was slowly retreating into the chaparral, and the sun was sinking over the mountains far to the west-

ward, Ralph took Oliver back to where a surgeon might give him the necessary attention.

"He isn't wounded," said the surgeon, after a hasty examination. "He must have dropped from exhaustion, but —"

"Isn't wounded?" ejaculated Ralph. "I thought a cannon-ball hit him!"

"A cannon-ball?"

"Yes, doctor. You see one flew by us and he went down —"

"Ah! that's the trouble, young man. Poor fellow, I trust he gets over it."

"But what is the trouble?"

"The cannon-ball took his breath away, it passed so close to his mouth. See, his nose is beginning to bleed, and that's not a bad sign. He'll be all right, unless he happened to have very weak lungs."

"No, he was rather strong."

"Then I guess he'll come around before a great while."

Inside of half an hour the battle-field grew dark and the Americans rested where they had fought, the infantry sleeping on their arms and the artillery between the wheels of their pieces. It had been a hard battle and most of the soldiers slept the sleep of the overtired, — and probably the Mexicans did the same. The loss to Uncle Sam's troops in killed and wounded was about fifty, the

loss to the Mexicans was two hundred killed and twice as many wounded and missing, certainly a remarkable showing in our favour.

For the greater part of the night, Ralph watched over Oliver, having obtained special permission to remain with his friend. It was two hours after having fallen before the young soldier opened his eyes, gave a gasp, and tried to sit up.

"Oh, Oliver, I'm glad to see this!" cried Ralph.

Oliver tried to speak, but the effort only ended in a violent cough, and Ralph hastened to make him remain quiet.

"Don't talk," said Ralph. "It will only hurt you if you do. Do you know what happened? A cannon-ball came close to your mouth and took the wind out of your lungs. If your lungs hadn't been strong, the surgeon says you might have had a hemorrhage that would kill you. You must keep quiet and I'll take care of you. Do you want a drink of water? If you do, nod your head."

Oliver nodded, and Ralph procured the freshest water he could find and gave it to him. The hurt youth drank eagerly, and presently began to breathe more naturally.

"The cannon-ball came pretty close to both of us," went on Ralph. "It wounded two men in the rear, Dawson and Hickey, and killed a horse be-

longing to Lieutenant Rose. So you see we can be thankful that we escaped as we did. My, but it was a hot fight, wasn't it? The Mexicans aren't far away and I shouldn't wonder if the fight goes on again to-morrow."

After the other wounded had been cared for, Oliver was carried to the hospital camp and placed on a cot, and here he fell asleep.

"He'll be all right in a few days," said one of the doctors, and assured of this, Ralph, at three o'clock in the morning, stole back to his company, pitched himself upon the prairie grass, and was soon as sound in slumber as anybody.

The camp, if such the bivouac on the battle-field can be termed, was astir early, and as usual the superior officers held a council of war. Some of the conservative ones wished to delay another encounter, fearing the Mexican command had been reinforced during the night. But General Taylor would not listen to this.

"Delays are dangerous," he said. "Go to your respective commands; we move forward in thirty minutes." And the others, knowing he meant just what he said, hurried forth to take charge of their troops and guns.

During the night General Arista had slightly shifted his position from the plain called Palo Alto to a ravine lined with palm-trees, and consequently called the Resaca de la Palma, or Ravine of

Palms, a resaca being a ravine or gully. On every side were palms and mesquite bushes, with prickly-pears in abundance.

The Mexican movement had been advantageous, for they now held the ravine and the dense chaparral close by, and to reach this spot in a direct line the Americans would have to expose themselves over a stretch of prairie half a mile wide. Across the Resaca de la Palma there lay a smaller ravine, and here was planted a strong Mexican battery to sweep any advance that might be contemplated in that direction.

General Taylor was undismayed, as we have seen, and now he went forward with a confidence that was almost startling. He had sent many of his wounded back to Point Isabel, leaving only a few, including Oliver, with the wagon-train. This train was parked, as it is sometimes called, on the battle-field of Palo Alto, and with the wagons the commander left his eighteen-pounders and their ox-teams and also two ten-pounders. Then with only about two thousand men he set out to defeat Arista and save the garrison at Fort Brown, which was still being vigorously bombarded.

Having reached the woods in front of the ravine, General Taylor sent forward a party to examine the enemy's position. A masked battery was discovered, and several regiments of infantry, under Lieutenant Ridgeley, were ordered for-

ward, to bring on an engagement, other troops going to the left, under Captain McCall.

With his company Ralph charged into the ravine, and in a few minutes was in the midst of a battle the like of which he had scarcely anticipated. Shot and canister flew over the soldiers' heads, while here and there a shell burst in their midst. Then, as the two armies drew closer, hand-to-hand conflicts became numerous and the constantly click-clacking of sword to sword and bayonet to bayonet was heard, punctuated constantly by the cracking of pistols and the booming of cannon. Soon the ravine was filled with smoke and the shrieks of the wounded, and still the battle raged on, as if it would never come to an end.

It must be confessed that Ralph was much excited. Yet he managed, young as he was, to keep his wits about him, and he fired with good effect. As he was leaping over a pond at the bottom of the ravine, he saw a Mexican raise his musket and take full aim at his captain. As quickly as he could he aimed at the Mexican, and both firearms cracked simultaneously. The American captain was slightly wounded in the side, the Mexican fell with a bullet through his thigh. Thus the tide of battle went on. Ralph was struck on the shoulder, but never knew it until a fellow soldier told him the blood was coming through his uniform.

"Blood?" he queried, and put his hand up. Then he felt of the wound. It was not much more than a scratch.

"I'll be thankful if I don't get worse," he said, grimly, and plunged on toward a hill around the end of the ravine.

The Fourth Infantry had waded through one of the ponds of the ravine, which was two hundred feet wide, and captured a gun which had been doing the Mexicans a great service. Now General Taylor called Captain May, of the dragoons, to him.

"Can you take the batteries yonder?" he asked, anxiously.

"I will do it, sir," was the answer, from this daring soldier, and he hurried forward to his men.

"Men, follow me," he shouted. "We must take yonder battery! General Taylor's eyes are on us. Come!" And the dragoons did come, pell-mell, and with such vigour that the Mexican gunners rallied in vain against them. In this charge, General La Vega was captured. The Americans tried to keep the guns, but General Arista sent reinforcements to the battery and it was retaken. Then our soldiers charged again, aided by the Fifth Infantry, and at last the battery was driven from its strong position.

In the meantime there was other fighting along the ravine and behind it. The Mexicans tried in vain to form into a solid body to withstand the

advance of the Americans, who were fighting as never before. But General Taylor's army could not be withstood, and on it rushed, scattering the enemy like chaff before the wind.

At last the Mexicans began to retreat, at first in small companies and then by regiments, and in all directions, so that the withdrawal from the battle-field became little less than a panic. At this a mighty roar went up from the troops of Uncle Sam:

"The day is ours! The Mexicans are running! Hurrah for the stars and stripes!" And the band coming up, struck up "Yankee Doodle" in a way that made every heart bound with joy. Soon the Americans were in the very heart of Arista's late camp, and here they found everything as the Mexicans had left it, — camp furniture, trunks, their tents and extra weapons, and even General Arista's private papers and maps, along with some money which had been brought forward for the purpose of paying off the soldiers. The Mexicans had not dreamed of such an utter rout, and had fled in a dismay that was little short of terror.

This battle of Resaca de la Palma was of great importance to our country, for it freed the soil of Texas for ever from the invader, and assured to us the safety of the besieged garrison at Fort Brown. The loss to the Americans was 125 killed and

wounded, the loss to the Mexicans was almost a thousand. The battle-field was a terrible spot after the carnage, and the Americans alone were left to bury the dead and care for the wounded. Quite a few prisoners were taken, some being sent back to Point Isabel and others being kept at Fort Brown.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HANK STIGER COMES TO GRIEF

"THE day is won! The fort is saved!"

What a ringing shout Dan let out when this was an assured fact. For hours the suspense had been terrible. The Mexicans had been pouring in shot and shell, and the garrison could do but little in return. Once in awhile the old eighteen-pounder was fired, to let General Taylor know that all was still well with the soldiers, although their gallant leader, Major Brown, was dead. All could hear the booming of the batteries at Resaca de la Palma quite plainly, for the distance was but four miles. Then of a sudden some Mexican infantry burst into view, followed by some cavalry, and all rushing for the river as though the demon of Death were after them, and the garrison knew that the day was won. The shouting was terrific, and one officer ran up on the parapet, followed by another, and then the soldiers came up, and there ensued a veritable jubilee.

"The ferry! Shoot the Mexicans down before they can get across!" was the next cry from

those in the fort, and as rapidly as possible the old eighteen-pounder was trained on the upper ferry, and a shower of grape-shot was hurled into the fleeing column just as some were getting on the boats. The havoc was great, and some Mexicans threw down their arms and began to swim while others sought the chaparral for protection.

General Taylor did not have enough men with him to guard the whole river front, and as night drew on the Mexicans took advantage of the darkness and retired as speedily as possible to Matamoras in various ways. In the meantime, the church bells of the city, which had been ringing victoriously earlier in the day, became silent, for all the inhabitants of the place knew that the day was lost to the Mexican Republic.

Dan and Ralph met on the battle-field on the day following the victory of the ravine, both being out in parties sent forth to bring in the wounded and assist at the burial of the dead.

The greeting was a warm one and each was glad to learn that the other was not seriously wounded.

"We had a hot time of it at the fort," remarked Dan. "But I reckon you had an even hotter time here and at Palo Alto."

"Well, we did have a hot time," answered Ralph, modestly, and then went into some of the details. Of course Dan was sorry to hear

Oliver was laid up, but glad to know it was not serious.

"The Mexicans have left Texan soil, and I doubt if they ever come over here again," said the elder Radbury.

The caring for the dead and wounded was not a pleasant task, and the brothers were glad when it was over. With a number of others they were sent in the chaparral back of the Resaca de la Palma to hunt for such American soldiers as had not yet been brought to light.

They were picking their way among a number of prickly-pears when, on reaching a turn around a clump of mesquite bushes, they came upon several tattered camp-followers, — fellows who follow every army in order to pick up anything that may be found lying loose.

"The rascals!" muttered the officer in command of the party. "I declare I never see such fellows but I want to shoot them down on sight."

The camp-followers were moving in the same direction as the soldiers, so they did not at once discover the latter. They had spotted two bodies lying near, — that of a United States regular and that of a Mexican regular, and rushing forward, they commenced to go through the pockets of the dead men's uniforms.

"Stop!" roared the officer. "Let up, or, by Cæsar, I'll order my men to fire on you!"

The camp-followers were startled and immediately leaped up. As they did so both Dan and Ralph made a discovery, and cried out in amazement:

"Hank Stiger!"

"Do you know one of these wretches?" questioned the officer in charge.

"We do, only too well," answered Dan. "That man's name is Hank Stiger. He is a half-breed from Gonzales, and he once tried to blow up my father's log cabin. His reputation is thoroughly bad."

The camp-followers were surrounded. One was a big brute of a fellow, and he said he had a right to be where he was.

"I'm lookin' fer my brother, pard," he said, in an off-handed way to the officer. "No harm in thet, is there?"

"No, no harm in that," was the stern answer. "Is this your brother?" and the officer in charge pointed to the dead American.

"Yes," was the hesitating answer.

"What is your name?"

"Now, see here, leftenant —"

"Stop! I asked you your name."

"But I say, left—"

"Your name, or I'll put you under arrest instantly."

"Darry Gow."

"What is your brother's name?"

"George Gow."

"And this is your brother?"

"That's what I said."

"You seem to be quick at lying. This man is a private of the Third Infantry, and his name is not Gow nor anything like it."

"Wall, er — my eyesight is poor, and perhaps —"

"Stop. Private Radbury, step forward and examine this man's pockets."

The officer looked at Dan, and the young soldier moved forward to do as requested. The big camp-follower tried to beg off, but without avail. From his pockets were taken three silver watches, a gold timepiece, several rings, and some other jewelry, and over forty dollars in bills and silver.

"All my own," insisted Darry Gow. "Swapped 'em in fer terbacker. The boys is terribly hard up fer terbacker."

"You wretch, do you suppose I am going to believe such a story?" answered the officer. "Consider yourself under arrest. If you try to get away my men shall shoot you down."

After this the others of the party, three in number, were searched, and from each of them was taken about the same amount of stuff as taken from the leader. When thus exposed, Hank Stiger knew not what to say.

"I — dat is — Gow give me dis las' night to save fer him," stammered the half-breed. "I don't know nuthin' of where he got the things."

"I reckon it's a case of the pot calling the kettle black," interrupted the officer. "I place every one of you under arrest. You can tell your stories when you are safe in the prison at Point Isabel."

"What! you going to send us to prison!" cried Hank Stiger.

"Yes, and perhaps we'll shoot you — if we can prove you killed any of the men from whom these things were stolen," added the officer.

At once a chorus of howls went up and all of the party did their best to beg off, but the officer was obdurate, and at last told them to be silent. The prisoners were placed in care of double the number of soldiers and marched off.

In the party to take the prisoners away was Dan, and on the way Stiger upbraided the elder Radbury for giving him such a black name.

"I shall not forget that!" he hissed into the young soldier's ear. "Some day I may get a chance to pay you back!"

"I'll be on my guard, Stiger," was the answer. "And you take care, too. I sha'n't let you off as easily as my father did years ago, remember that." At this the half-breed scowled viciously and said no more.

These were not the only camp-followers brought in. Some villainous Mexicans were captured and also placed under arrest. Two of the number had murdered several American soldiers who were wounded and helpless to resist them, and these rascals were put in close confinement. They tried, later on, to escape, and both were shot down.

For several days Ralph and Dan were kept at the work of caring for the dead, and Poke Stover came out to join them and the others. Buzzards and jackals were numerous, and often they could not resist the temptation to shoot down the birds or beasts which were feasting on the exposed bodies.

"This is the worst side of the war," was Ralph's comment. "I never imagined anything so awful."

"Oh, war ain't all glory, thet's certain," answered Poke. "Ye have got ter take hard knocks, an' wuss. How a man kin become a regular soldier an' make it his life's business gits me — I couldn't do it, nohow," and the Radburys agreed with the old frontiersman.

Both the Mexican and the American armies had made a number of prisoners, and after the excitement along the Rio Grande had cooled down a little General Arista proposed an exchange of these men. General Taylor consented, and on the day following fifty-three Americans were

brought over to the plain near Fort Brown, under a strong Mexican guard. Then the Mexican prisoners were marched forth, and the "trading," as it was called, began, a captain for a captain, a sergeant for a sergeant, and so on, until all of the Americans were released. A good number of Mexicans still remained to our credit, and these begged so hard to be let go, that General Taylor finally consented, taking General Arista's receipt for them, so that if any Americans were ever taken by the Mexicans later on we could call for them up to the limit of that receipt. By this means the Mexicans got back into their own country, and we were saved the trouble and expense of guarding and feeding them. Among our prisoners were General Vega and Colonel Martinez. They were offered their parole, but declined it, saying their country would make them fight anyhow; so they remained prisoners of war.

It was now necessary that General Taylor pay Point Isabel a visit, and this was done as speedily as possible. When returning in the direction of Fort Brown he was met by a despatch bearer, who told him that fresh Mexican troops had arrived at Matamoras and that the Mexicans were fortifying the town of Barita, near the mouth of the Rio Grande.

"Well, they won't hold Barita long," said General Taylor, and at once returned to Point Isabel.

Here he found some reinforcements had just arrived, and immediately despatched troops to the town. At the same time, Commodore Connor, of the navy, sailed for the mouth of the Rio Grande with three ships. But the Mexicans heard of the approach of the Americans and the soldiers fled, leaving the town to be taken without the firing of a shot.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CAPTURED ON THE RIO GRANDE

"TELL you what, boys, the weather is getting mighty warm."

It was Poke Stover who spoke. He was standing over a bucket of water, in which he had just been washing his face and hands. Half an hour before he had come in from some work which was still in progress on Fort Brown.

"Yes; but it's not half as warm as it was at Palo Alto and the fight in the ravine," answered Ralph, with a laugh.

"Or as it was here when the bombardment was on," put in Dan. "Oh, but we caught it those days, I can tell you that."

"I wonder what our next move will be," went on Ralph. "I don't reckon we'll stay here, do you?"

"We'll cross the river afore long, I calkerlate," came from the old frontiersman. "General Taylor ain't the man to stand still an' rest himself on one or two victories."

All had enjoyed several days of comparative rest, and each felt the better for it. Oliver was

still in the hospital, but was doing nicely, and with him was George Nolan, who had received an ugly bayonet thrust through the calf of his left leg.

"We bagged Hank Stiger finely," went on Dan. "I only wish that rascal Juan Badillo had been in the crowd, and we had caught him, too."

"I wonder if we'll ever see the Giant again," mused Ralph.

"A bad penny always turns up again, they say, Ralph. For my part, I never want to set eyes on him again."

"Nor I, for the matter of that."

So the talk ran on, until it was time to go to drill, when the young soldiers leaped up from where they were resting in the grass just outside of the fort. The drill had an added interest to Dan, for he was now an acting sergeant of the command to which he was attached.

As soon as General Taylor came back to Fort Brown, he began preparations to take Matamoras, where he knew were stored large quantities of war material, as well as other public property of value. The preparations took several days, but on the 17th of May all was in readiness, the batteries being trained on the city, and the boats being close at hand to convey the soldiers over the swollen stream as rapidly as possible.

"Now for more fighting!" cried Ralph, when the call to arms came, but before the soldiers

could be moved, or the batteries had started their bombardment, a messenger came over from the Mexican headquarters, asking that Old Rough and Ready grant an armistice, pending the settlement of the question by the two governments.

"I will grant no armistice," said General Taylor, and then mentioned how he had asked for an armistice some time before and been refused. "I am receiving large reinforcements," he added, "and shall take the city without delay. If General Arista will allow us to come in peaceably, he can withdraw with his troops, but he must leave all public property behind." Our commander then went on to speak about how the Mexicans had promised to conduct the war according to the rules of civilised nations, and how they had allowed their soldiers to mutilate the Americans and rob them. To this the messenger, General Reguena, replied that this dastardly work had been done by the rancheros and the women who followed the army for gain!

Seeing he could do nothing with General Taylor, the Mexican messenger withdrew, promising a reply by three o'clock. That hour came and went, and the messenger did not reappear. At once General Taylor got his army into readiness to move upon the city, and the soldiers were marched some up and some down the river bank before dark.

The commands to which the Radburys and Poke Stover were attached were now together, and the brothers hurried up the river bank together and slept on the same patch of prairie grass, under the twinkling stars.

"The river is running pretty swiftly," remarked Dan, when they arose early on the morning following. "I don't believe we are going to have an easy time of it getting across."

"There don't seem to be enough boats," said Ralph.

"The cavalry and officers on horseback will swim their hosses over," came from Poke.

"Can they do it, Poke?"

"They can if the hosses are trained to the water. If not, it may go hard with some of 'em."

It was not long before the troops began to go over. It was slow work, and Ralph and the others had to wait at a bend for the best part of an hour.

As he and Dan were standing on a fallen tree close to the water's edge, they heard a wild shout from up the river, and saw an old soldier standing on the bank waving his arms frantically.

"What's the matter?" cried Dan.

"Captain Bardock is overboard! The current turned his horse upside down!"

"Then the captain will have to swim for it," said Dan.

"Don't know as he can swim, and, besides, he may have his foot caught in the stirrup," answered the old soldier. "He's coming your way; watch for him."

At once Ralph and Dan ran out as far as the fallen tree permitted.

At first they could see little but the swiftly flowing river with its bits of floating driftwood, then Ralph caught sight of a horse over on his side and a man's foot sticking up near the animal's neck.

"There he is!"

"Where?" queried Dan.

"There, behind yonder log. I'm afraid he's as good as drowned!"

"Not if I can help him," returned Dan, and in a twinkle he threw off his hat and coat and was plunging in the stream.

Near the tree the water was shallow, and he waded out fifty feet before he came to the edge of the bank. Then he struck out boldly for the horse and its unfortunate rider.

Beast and officer were struggling madly to save themselves, and as Dan drew closer he had to take care that the horse did not strike him down and kill him. There was an eddy at this point, and for a moment the progress down the river was stayed.

At last Dan was close enough to see the lower portion of the officer's body, and he made a clutch

at it. Then he saw that the officer's coat was caught fast to the saddle, and he began to try to loosen it.

This was no light task and twice he had to let go, for fear the animal would cut him in the head with his flying hoofs.

"Take care, Dan, or you'll be killed!" shouted Ralph. "Can I do anything?"

"Yes, get a rope if you can," was the answer, and Ralph ran off to do as requested.

Again Dan went to work, and just as the horse began a final struggle he wrenched the unfortunate officer free from the saddle and caught him in his arms.

The moment the officer felt the proximity of another human being he clutched out wildly for safety and grabbed Dan by the throat. This was a new peril for the young soldier, and with all his remaining power he had to force the man away from him.

"Take it easy," he said, when he could speak. "Take it easy and I will save you."

"I — I — can't — swim!" was the gasping answer. "I — I am afraid we'll — both — go — down!"

By this time the pair had drifted a hundred feet below the log and were coming to a point where the river grew broader. Supporting the officer on one shoulder, Dan tried to strike out for

the bank. But he was now weak, and the effort was of small avail.

In the meantime Ralph had run up to the nearest supply-wagon, and after some difficulty procured a rope. He came back to the bank only to find Dan and the officer far out of his reach down the stream. He ran along the water's edge, and several others joined in the chase.

Poor Dan was all but exhausted when he and his burden bumped up against a mass of driftwood, for the river was full of the stuff. In the driftwood were several small trees which had become entangled together. He clutched one of the trees and drew himself and his burden up. As he did this, he seemed to collapse, and for several minutes he knew not where he was or what was happening.

When Dan came fully to his senses he found himself and the officer far out in the stream. He tried to stand up on the drifting trees, but this caused the improvised raft to wobble, and he sat down again, having no desire to reënter the water. He looked at the officer, but the latter did not move.

"Perhaps he is dead," thought Dan, and bent over the man, who was apparently a young fellow like himself. But the officer was alive, although insensible.

On and on drifted the floating trees until with

a bump they landed against some other driftwood, close to the Mexican shore. Then Dan heard a shouting in Spanish, and soon after saw two Mexican soldiers aiming their guns at him.

"Don't shoot!" he called, in Spanish. "Don't shoot!" And then the guns were gradually lowered.

The driftwood struck the Mexican bank, and without ceremony Dan was ordered to come ashore. Although in the hands of the enemy, he did not hesitate, preferring solid ground to the uncertain river. He picked up the officer in his arms and struggled through the mud to a safe place, behind a fringe of bushes, which hid the Mexican soldiers from the American side of the stream.

"Do you surrender?" demanded one of the soldiers.

"I suppose I'll have to," answered Dan, grimly. There seemed nothing else to do. They were two to one, and fully armed, while he had no weapon of any kind.

The Mexican soldiers were by no means bad fellows, and one of them readily assisted Dan in caring for Captain Bardock. He noted that the unconscious man was an officer, and at once called another guard, who took the news to headquarters.

Ten minutes later an ambulance belonging to the Mexican army drove up and Captain Bardock

"'DON'T SHOOT!' HE CALLED, IN SPANISH."

was placed in it, after being examined, to make certain that he was still alive. Then Dan was told to enter also.

"If he is your friend you can work over him and save him," said one of the guards.

"He is a stranger to me, but I will do what I can for him," answered Dan, and kept his word. As he worked the ambulance was driven rapidly through Matamoras and out of town, but this Dan did not notice until some time afterward.

CHAPTER XXV.

SURRENDER OF MATAMORAS

"WHAT'S the matter, Ralph?" demanded Poke Stover, as he came hurrying to the bank of the Rio Grande, having heard that something was wrong.

"Do you see that driftwood, over toward the other shore?"

"I do."

"Well, Dan is in that — along with an officer he tried to save from drowning."

"Dan!"

"Yes."

"Is he alive?"

"Oh, yes, but I don't know if the officer is."

"But how did he get thar, lad? I thought he was waiting with the rest of you," went on the old frontiersman, with deep concern.

"He was waiting. But the officer's horse turned over in the strong current and he was in danger of drowning. Dan went to the rescue, and that is the result," answered Ralph, bitterly.

By this time the driftwood was nearly out of

sight around a bend. Ralph ran down the bank, and Poke and some others came after him. But the overhanging trees shut off the view, and nobody on the American side saw what became of Dan or Captain Bardock.

It must be confessed that this incident cast a gloom, not alone over Ralph and Poke Stover, but also over many others, who were their friends and the friends of Captain Bardock, who belonged to the cavalry.

"We ought to go over after 'em," said Poke, but this could not be, as the troops had to march farther up the stream before crossing.

The soldiers were anxious to begin the attack on Matamoras, but General Taylor had learned a useful lesson while fighting the Indians in the West and in Florida, and he took good care that he should not be caught in a trap.

While arranging to enter the city from above and below on the river, Old Rough and Ready also sent forward some officers for a "parley," as it was termed. Some Mexicans answered the white flag borne by Lieutenant Brittin, and he then told the Mexicans that Captain Bliss wished to talk to the prefect, the official civic representative of Matamoras. At first there was some delay, but in the end the American messenger was conducted to the prefect's office, located on the Grand Plaza of the town.

"And what is it you wish?" demanded the prefect, trying to put on a bold front.

"General Taylor demands the immediate surrender of this place," was the answer. "And he wishes it understood that all public stores shall remain as they are."

The prefect demurred and then asked what would be done with private property.

"Private property will be respected, the citizens will be protected by our soldiery, and we will not interfere with your religion. If you do not give up, General Taylor is resolved to take the city, even at the point of the sword."

The prefect begged for time to consider the question, but this could not be granted, for General Taylor was already suspicious. At last the prefect said that General Taylor could march in and take possession as soon as he pleased!

This communication was carried to our commander as speedily as possible. But in the meantime the soldiers had begun to cross the river at several points. Scouts were sent out in advance, so that there should be no surprise on General Arista's part, as previously suggested.

The first party to go over were ten selected scouts. They were quickly followed by companies of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Infantry, followed soon after by Ker's dragoons. The artillery was then taken apart and carried over in pieces, a

laborious work, for the pieces were heavy, especially those of the eighteen-pounders.

Captain Bliss had scarcely brought the prefect's message to General Taylor when a shout of joy went up, for Captain Ker had raised on the walls of Fort Parades the glorious stars and stripes.

"Hurrah, the flag waves over Matamoras!" was the cry. "Hurrah for Uncle Sam!"

And then the cheering became general from one end of the line to the other. General Taylor had not only driven the enemy from the United States, but had raised our flag in Mexican territory.

It did not take Old Rough and Ready long to ascertain the truth of what he had already suspected, namely, that the visit of General Reguena had been made only to gain time, so that General Arista might make good his departure from Matamoras. The Mexican general had left Matamoras the afternoon before, taking with him about four thousand soldiers and several pieces of artillery. Other artillery was buried in wells and cisterns. A good part of the public stores had either been destroyed or thrown into the river. General Arista left behind him many of his sick and wounded, but took with him all of the prisoners he had managed to obtain since the day of the exchange.

It was a night of rejoicing for the majority of our soldiers, but Ralph and his friends were gloomy enough. The troops were stationed above and

below the city, only a few being placed within as a guard. Ralph went to his superior and asked to be allowed to go on a hunt for Dan.

"You can do nothing to-night," was the answer. "You can go in the morning, unless we march after General Arista."

In the morning, as there was no movement contemplated by the majority of the troops, Ralph was allowed to go on the hunt for his brother. He took Poke with him, and the pair at once proceeded to the spot where they had last seen the driftwood.

The spot was all but deserted, and at first they were afraid they would gain no information. But at last an old Mexican woman came out of a nearby cabin and asked them, in her own peculiar Spanish, what they wished.

"Looking for an American who came ashore on some driftwood," said Poke, in equally bad Spanish. "Did you see him? Maybe there was an officer with him."

At this the Mexican woman nodded and said she would tell them for a piece of silver. She was little more than a hag, and Ralph was afraid she would lie to them even if she was paid.

"Tell her to describe Dan," said he, and Poke did so. This she did and they gave her an American quarter dollar. This loosened her tongue, and she related how Dan and Captain Bardock had

been carried off in an ambulance by General Arista's men.

"Where did they take them to?" asked Ralph, through the old frontiersman.

"To the army."

"Not to a hospital in Matamoras?"

"No. The soldiers said the hospitals were only for their own wounded. They said the *Americanos* were prisoners."

"Was the young soldier well?"

"Fairly well. He could stand. The *capitan* was like dead though," answered the woman.

"Which way did they drive?"

The woman pointed out the road. This was the limit of her knowledge, and she immediately begged for another silver piece. But they would not give her more, and she began to abuse them in the vilest manner possible. Then Poke threatened to throw her into the river, and she at once ran off and disappeared from their view.

"It's a bad business," said the frontiersman, when they were left alone. "I am afraid going after Arista's army will be foolhardy."

"But think of Dan a prisoner," cried the younger Radbury. "How he will suffer!"

"I reckon that's true, Ralph. But keep a stiff upper lip, it may all come right in the end."

"They will abuse him, I feel sure of it. See how they abused the wounded on the battle-field."

"Those weren't the reg'lar Mexican soldiers, lad — they were — were vampires, thet's wot."

On the way back to camp they fell in with some cavalry sent out after Arista's rear-guard. To the commander they told their story, and he readily consented to take them along.

The party, which was a mounted one, numbered about two hundred and fifty men, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Garland. There were a few extra horses to be had, and soon Ralph and Poke were mounted.

The way was over the prairie grass to a rocky plateau some distance south of the river. Here the general appearance of the country was not unlike that met with about the Rio Grande, between Corpus Christi and Point Isabel.

All day long the horsemen sped onward, but without catching sight of the rear-guard of the enemy. At night they rested at a ranch located on the bank of a small resaca, and here learned that the Mexican army was but one day's march ahead of them.

"We'll catch up with something to-morrow!" said the American commander.

"I hope we catch up with that ambulance containing my brother," murmured Ralph.

The next day the trail became harder to follow. It was fiercely hot, and they had to rest every few miles. Once the party became lost in the chaparral where the thorns were more than thick.

Here some of the horses balked and had to be led around by hand. It was a trying time, and several of the cavalrymen were taken sick and had to be sent back to Matamoras.

Early the next morning some of the enemy were sighted, near one of the hills to the southwestward, and the Americans bore down upon them with all possible speed, opening fire when still at long range. The Mexicans numbered probably fifty and had with them a large wagon, loaded with clothing and other stores. They were taken completely by surprise and offered but small resistance.

"Surrender!" cried the Americans, and the Mexican in charge of the wagon at once held up a bit of white cloth. Some of the soldiers fired wounding two of our cavalry. Then the Americans let drive and several Mexicans were killed.

This ended the fight, and twenty-two Mexicans were taken prisoners, the others fleeing for their lives on their ponies, which were swift and well trained to that country.

From one of the captured Mexicans it was learned that no other troops were within ten or fifteen miles, and that the road ahead was even more barren than that already passed. Accordingly Lieutenant-Colonel Garland resolved to return to Matamoras with his capture. This was done, and the hope of hearing anything more of Dan was, for the time being, abandoned.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN OLD ENEMY TURNS UP

AFTER the downfall of Matamoras the Army of Occupation took a well-needed rest. The hot weather was hard upon soldiers and horses alike, and the hospitals were filled with the sick and the wounded.

Down on the Rio Grande the sights to be seen every day were truly horrible. The water had been high but was now going down, and as it receded it brought to view many bodies of the slain that lay in the lower branches of the overhanging trees. Bodies floated by all day, followed by thousand of fish, big and little.

In the city the prefect was very arrogant, and would do little to help the Americans. Colonel Twiggs was appointed military governor of the city, and he at once gave the prefect such a lecture that the dignitary trembled in his boots, so it was said. He promised to do better, and through his aid some of the public stores were recovered, Still the actions of the prefect were very dictatorial, and at last he was told to leave, and he did,

to join Arista's army, vowing vengeance on the Americans who had deprived him of such a lucrative position.

The prefect had never been a popular man with the common citizens of Matamoras, and they hailed his going with secret delight. Some soon came forward with information and by this means still more of the public stores and treasure were found, much of it secreted close around the Grand Plaza.

As soon as he returned to the city, Ralph made the rounds of all the hospitals and sick camps, but could learn nothing of Dan. Consequently he was forced to believe that his brother had really been carried off to Monterey or some other Mexican stronghold.

"Well, thet's better nor to be shot down and chucked into the river," said Poke, soothingly. "If he's alive he has the chance to slip 'em, sooner or later." And with this questionable consolation the younger Radbury had to be content.

As the days went by, and the army in and around Matamoras did little or nothing, Ralph wrote to his father telling of what had happened, and also wrote to Mr. Fielding. The result was that both men came down to Matamoras and remained there for ten days. Oliver had also written home, stating he was to rejoin his company, but Mr. Fielding wanted to see with his own eyes how his son was faring.

"This news about Dan is bad," said Amos Radbury. "Even if he is alive I am afraid the Mexicans will treat him very harshly."

"Just what I imagine," added Ralph, dolefully. "It's enough to make one sick at heart to think about it. I wish we were to start for Monterey to-morrow."

"Are they certain General Arista retreated to that city?"

"Pretty certain, yes. If he is not there himself, he has left a big part of his army there. I reckon they have an idea that Monterey can't be taken as easily as Matamoras was. It is a terrible march over the barren plains, and, besides, Monterey is right between the mountains."

"Yes, I know, Ralph. If the army moved to-morrow I would go along, old as I am."

"Can you leave the ranch?"

"Yes. Pompey is there, with Kilmer and the others."

"Have you been bothered by any outsiders since we came away?"

"No. I once heard that Juan the Giant was around, but I never saw him."

"You heard about Hank Stiger?"

"Yes, and I am glad he is locked up. He is a thoroughly bad egg," concluded Amos Radbury.

Mr. Radbury remained with Ralph for several hours, and then called on Oliver and others that

he knew well. All were glad to see him, and some of the oldest of the Rangers wanted him to come and join them. But he shook his head.

"I fought in 1812, and when our State wanted her liberty," he said. "I am getting older, and I'll leave the fighting to the boys."

Congress had authorised an army of fifty thousand men, and these troops were assigned to three great divisions, the Army of Occupation, under General Taylor, the Army of the Centre, under Brigadier-General Wool, and the Army of the West, under Col. Stephen W. Kearney, who, soon after, was made a brigadier-general.

As soon as possible the troops under General Kearney were ordered to Santa Fé. They were to seize New Mexico and then push westward to California. This was a most important movement, and eventually brought to the United States the great gold fields of California, not to forget the great fruit-bearing regions of to-day. These troops travelled the plains of Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico, toiled up and down the gigantic mountain ranges, made their way painfully over several great deserts of Mexico, and fought battles which were among the most important of the war.

As soon as Matamoras was fully under American control trade began to pick up, and the horse market became of considerable importance, as did also the cotton market. Cotton had been sold at a

ridiculously high price by the Mexican dealers, and now some Yankees saw a chance to do business. They sold at a lower rate than the Mexicans, and yet at double the price they could get further north, and some of these fellows grew wealthy.

The horse market was always attractive to those who had come from the ranches, and whenever a soldier had any time off he would drift in that direction.

One day Ralph had the afternoon to himself and took Oliver with him. Oliver was now quite himself and almost as eager as Ralph to get after the Mexicans who had carried off Dan.

When the pair got down to the horse market, a rather dirty place, surrounded by part of a stone wall and several sheds, they found a crowd assembled, including Mexicans, soldiers, half-naked Indians, and people whom it would be difficult to classify. Buying and selling were going on briskly, and to look at the assemblage it would have been hard to believe that the Mexicans and the Americans were at war with each other.

From one spot in the market-place the young soldiers drifted to another. Here some ponies, mustangs, were on sale, and they stopped to admire the little animals.

"By ginger!" burst out Ralph, suddenly.

"What's up?" queried Oliver, much astonished by the unexpected outburst.

"Did you see him, Oliver?"

"See him? Who?"

"The man standing by yonder shed door. It was Juan the Giant!"

"Oh, Ralph, you must be mistaken."

"No, I wasn't mistaken — it was the rascal beyond a doubt. He saw me just as I saw him, too."

"Where did he go?"

"Slipped into the shed."

"Then let us go after him."

Feeling perfectly safe in that crowd, with at least fifty soldiers within calling distance, Ralph and Oliver forced their way through the assemblage until they reached the doorway to the building.

The shed was a gloomy affair, twenty feet wide by perhaps a hundred feet long, with an addition on one side forty feet deep. The place was full of dirty and foul-smelling straw and hay, for it had not been cleaned since the surrender of the city.

"Do you see him?" asked Ralph, as he tried to pierce the semi-darkness.

"I see two men at the other end," replied Oliver. "I don't know who they are."

They hurried over the dirty hay and straw until the opposite end of the shed was gained. Some Mexicans rested here, in the shade, smoking cigarettes. The Mexicans stared at them curiously.

"Did a big man just run from here?" questioned Ralph.

At this one after another of the Mexicans shrugged his shoulders. None of them could understand English, and at last one of them said so in Spanish. Then Ralph did his best to speak their language. His Spanish was exceedingly broken, yet he managed after several efforts to make them understand.

At this one of the Mexicans caught him by the shoulder, and pointed to another shed some distance away, to the rear of the market-place.

"The big man has gone there," he said.

Waiting to hear no more, Ralph and Oliver left the first shed and hurried toward the second. A crowd was coming away from the place, along with two rancheros who had brought in several horses to sell. They looked among the crowd, but could see nothing of Juan Badillo.

"He is not here," said Ralph.

"Let us search the shed," answered Oliver, and led the way into the structure. It was old and ramshackle to the last degree and ready to fall at the next heavy storm.

Like the first structure they had visited, this was also dark, and they had to remain for several seconds on the threshold until their eyes became accustomed to the change. Then they made out

a dim form in the centre, near a pile of straw, and Ralph ran toward it.

"Juan Badillo!" he called, sharply.

It was indeed the giant, and he turned to the two young soldiers with a scowling face.

"What you want?" he asked, of Ralph.

"I want you to come with me," answered Ralph.

"Go wid you? For what?"

"You know well enough. You escaped me and my friends in the mountains last year, but you sha'n't escape me now."

"You mak a big mistake. I no escape you — I no know you," returned the giant, with a shrug of his shoulders.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OLIVER AT THE OLD MILL

FOR the moment after Juan the Giant had made his assertion that he did not know Ralph, the young soldier could do nothing but stare at the fellow.

"You do not know me?" he gasped, at last.

"No, I do not know you," answered the Mexican.

"That is not true, Juan Badillo. You can't play any such trick on me."

"Ralph, you are not making a mistake, are you?" whispered Oliver. "Some of these greasers look a good deal alike, you know."

"Perhaps, but I know this big rascal well enough, and wouldn't forget him in a hundred years. Badillo, your game won't work. You must come with me. If you won't, I'll call the nearest guard and have you arrested right now."

The giant scowled more than ever, and looked around to see if anybody but the two young soldiers was near.

"I say you mak mistake," he said, slowly, as if thinking what to do next. "I know de man you mean. He is my — my cousin."

"His cousin!" repeated Oliver.

"Again I say your game won't work, Badillo. You are Juan Badillo, the man sometimes called the Giant, and nobody else. You will come with me," returned Ralph, firmly, and now he took a tight hold of the Mexican's arm.

As quick as a flash Juan the Giant tore himself loose. Then, before the young soldier could realise what was coming, he was lifted up bodily and flung at Oliver, and both of the young soldiers went down in a heap on the dirty straw.

"Oh, dear!" came from Oliver, who was underneath. "Get off my head, Ralph!"

"The scoundrel!" ejaculated Ralph, as he managed to scramble up, although not without difficulty. "Where did he go to?"

He looked up and down the stable, and then to one of the little side windows. At the window he caught sight of Badillo's foot as it was drawn through the opening. He leaped to the spot, but long before he arrived there the Mexican had vanished.

"He has given you the slip, after all," said Oliver. "Say, but wasn't that a throw!"

"He isn't called the Giant for nothing," returned Ralph. "But, just the same, he shall not

escape me. Come on!" And with a leap he was through the window himself. Looking across the crowd in the market-place, he had caught sight of a Mexican hat towering above those around it, and felt the headgear must belong to the giant.

Oliver followed through the window, and the two young soldiers hurried into the crowd. But the people were shifting to make place for a ranchero who was going to show what one of his horses could do, and in a moment their further progress seemed blocked.

"Keep back, or the horse will run over you!" was the cry, in Spanish, and then the steed pranced around, and they were glad to get out of the way of the ranchero, who was yelling wildly and doing all sorts of odd things on horseback, to the delight of the onlookers, who shouted "Bravo!" and clapped their hands.

It was several minutes before they felt free to proceed, and once on the edge of the market-place Ralph looked around again for Juan the Giant. But he was now nowhere to be seen.

"Confound that rider!" ejaculated the younger Radbury. "If it hadn't been for him I would have had that rascal sure."

"Let us continue the hunt, he can't be far off," returned Oliver.

They walked around the market-place, and looked into all of the sheds and also the near-by

shops, which were crowded with horse traders. During the tour they met several friends, but it was a good half-hour before they ran across anybody who had seen Badillo, and knew what had become of the fellow.

"Yes, I saw him," said a Texan they met coming to the market-place.

"Where?"

"Going down the road to the ferry," and the Texan pointed in the direction.

"How long ago was this?"

"Not more than five minutes. But Badillo looked as if he was in a big hurry, Radbury."

"He was in a hurry, Cordon. I am after him. He is wanted for horse stealing," answered Ralph, and then set off on a run for the ferry, with Oliver beside him.

In those days the ferry across the river to the Point Isabel trail, as it was called, was a primitive affair. Two Mexicans had strung a rope over the river. They had a flatboat large enough to accommodate a dozen people, or several men with their horses, and they moved this flatboat from one side to the other by hauling the craft along the rope by hand. This was slow work, and occasionally, when the current was extra strong, the boat broke loose and went drifting down-stream for a considerable distance.

It did not take the two young soldiers long

to reach the Rio Grande. The river had been falling steadily, but the current was still strong. As they approached the ferry landing they saw the boat out in midstream, loaded with several men, and with a horse and half a dozen big Mexican market-baskets.

"I don't see him —" began Ralph, when he noticed a man crouching down behind the market-baskets. "Yes, there he is!"

"Ferry ahoy!" shouted Oliver. "Come back here!"

"We want one of your passengers!" shouted Ralph.

"What's that?" demanded a guard standing near. "What do you want of him?"

As quickly as he could, Ralph explained. The guard scratched his head.

"I don't know about this," he mused. "It ain't no war crime, so to speak. Besides, we're in Mexico, you must remember."

"Well, you have him brought back, and I'll take care of the rest," returned Ralph. "He is wanted for half a dozen crimes besides stealing those horses."

"Then why don't you have him arrested in Texas?"

"How can I get over?"

"There is a rowboat, you can use that, I calculate."

By this time the flatboat had almost gained the opposite shore. Ralph looked at the rowboat and saw the oars resting on the seat.

"Will you go?" he asked of his chum.

"Certainly," returned Oliver.

No more was said, and in a few seconds the rowboat was untied and shoved off. Instantly the current caught it and turned it down-stream. But then the young soldiers took up the oars and began to row with all of their strength. They were not skilled at this sort of work, yet they made fair progress, and came up behind the flatboat less than two minutes after the ferry passengers had been landed.

Badillo was making off up the river bank with all possible speed, and this was saying a good deal, for the fellow was a fast runner. He had spotted Ralph and Oliver in the rowboat, and felt that Ralph meant to do his utmost to punish him.

"There he goes!" cried Oliver.

"I see him," came from Ralph. "Quick, or he'll get away from us again!"

"What are you up to?" asked another guard, stationed also at the ferry.

"We want to catch that man," answered Ralph. "He is Badillo, the horse thief."

On went the two young soldiers, along the river and through some heavy rolling prairie grass. Presently they struck a road running past a num-

ber of old-fashioned Mexican dwellings, set in gardens of fruit and flowers. They saw that Juan the Giant was still running on.

There were several guards on the river at this point, but they were not suspecting anything wrong on this warm, lazy day, and did not arouse as Badillo slipped past. Then the giant hurried on to what had once been a grist-mill on the bank of a little stream flowing into the Rio Grande. The mill was now abandoned, and its water-wheel was fallen to decay, and likewise a large portion of its roof.

Badillo was now tired out with running. He had expected the young soldiers to give up the chase as soon as the vicinity of Fort Brown was passed, and now that they were still after him he hardly knew what to do.

"I must get the best of them," he muttered to himself, in Spanish, and ran around the old mill. On the upper side was a wide open doorway, and he slipped through this and made his way over the rotten floor of the place to where a ladder connected with an upper floor. He mounted the ladder, and crouched down on the floor close to the opening.

Ralph and Oliver thought the man had kept on, and when the mill was gained, and they no longer saw him on the trail, they were perplexed.

"He is gone!" burst from Ralph's lips. "I don't see him anywhere."

"Nor I."

"He was here a moment ago. Do you reckon he passed into this tumbled-down place?"

"Perhaps, Ralph."

"Supposing you go in and look around, and I'll continue up the trail. If you find him, call to me."

Oliver was willing, and turned into the mill without delay, but being careful not to break his neck over the rotten planking lying around. Ralph went on, and soon a turn in the trail hid him from view.

Like the cattle-sheds in Matamoras, the old mill was a gloomy place, and Oliver could at first see little or nothing. He noticed the dilapidated flooring, and looking down saw the water which had overflown the river bank. The place was damp and foul-smelling, and made him shiver in spite of himself.

Presently he moved to the opposite end of the mill and looked around. Nothing was to be seen of the Mexican, and he continued his hunt through the various rooms of the mill. Then he came back and looked at the ladder.

"Perhaps he went up-stairs," he mused. "Anyway, it won't do any harm to look around. Ralph can't be so very far off yet."

He ascended the ladder and caught hold of the flooring above. As he came up, he heard a hasty

movement. The next moment Juan the Giant had him by the arm.

"Silence!" hissed the rascal, in Spanish, but even as he spoke Oliver let out a shrill cry for help. Then the giant caught him by the throat, and held him in that vise-like grip until the young soldier's senses forsook him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCH

"OLIVER must have found him!"

So spoke Ralph to himself, as that single shrill cry echoed on the evening air. Without delay he turned from the trail up the river, and hurried back in the direction of the old mill.

"Oliver! Oliver! Where are you?" he called.

No answer came back, and at the entrance to the building he stopped short.

"Oliver, are you inside?" he questioned.

Again no answer, and now he began to grow alarmed. Had any evil befallen his chum? He saw how rotten was the flooring, and noted the river beneath. Could Oliver have fallen through?

"Oliver, why don't you answer me?" he said, and listened with strained ears. Then he caught a faint sound overhead. "Are you up there?"

The faint sound was repeated, and, more alarmed than ever, Ralph began to mount the ladder, thinking his chum must be caught fast. Perhaps a beam had fallen on him and was choking him to death!

Juan the Giant was waiting for him. The rascal's success in outwitting Oliver had made him bolder, and no sooner did Ralph show his head than the Mexican pounced upon him.

"You will follow me, hey?" he hissed. "I will pay you for dat!" and he clutched at Ralph's throat.

"Le-let go!" gasped the young soldier. "Let go, I say!"

But Badillo would not let go. Instead, he increased his grip. A fierce hand-to-hand struggle ensued, and both rolled over the flooring and dangerously close to the opening. Then Badillo drew back, and Ralph managed to get a fresh breath. Again they went at it, and now the giant tried to draw a knife he carried. But before he could do so there came a crash, and the flooring gave way, and not only Badillo and Ralph, but likewise the unconscious Oliver, were pitched to the flooring below. Ralph struck on his head and shoulder, and, after the first shock, knew no more.

Oliver was the first of the two young soldiers to stir. He came to himself with a start, to find his head aching fearfully, and with a pain in the side that was new to him.

"Oh, dear!" he murmured, and sat up in bewilderment. For the moment he could not tell where he was, or what had happened. Night had come, and all was dark around him.

At last he remembered the attack Badillo had made upon him. Was he still in the loft of the mill? More than likely. But no, he could hear the water flowing just beneath him. Therefore, he must be on the ground floor.

"Reckon he carried me down, or I tumbled down," he mused, and felt around him. His hand touched a broken beam and some rotten boards, and, feeling further, he caught hold of Ralph's foot.

He was now more alarmed than ever, thinking the foot belonged to Badillo. Had the flooring given way and pitched them both down?

"Badillo!" he called out. And as there was no answer, he called again, "Badillo!"

The only answer was a long-drawn sigh. Something about the sigh caused Oliver to start. This could not be Badillo, after all. He got on his hands and knees and felt along the form.

"Ralph! How in the world did he get here, and what brought the flooring down on top of us?"

There was no way to answer this question, and Oliver wished he had a light. He felt in his pockets, and then gave another start. He had been robbed! Everything he possessed had been taken from him!

"More of Badillo's work!" he told himself. "Well, I reckon we can be thankful that he spared our lives — if Ralph *is* alive."

Despite the pain he was suffering, Oliver managed to clear himself of the wreckage, and went to his chum's assistance. He had to lift some of the boards from Ralph's breast. This done, he carried his chum into the open and to some heavy grass, where the moon and stars might shine down on the deathlike face. He noted with satisfaction that Ralph breathed with fair regularity.

"I'll bathe his face, perhaps that will do some good," he reasoned, and ran down to the water's edge. He had no cup, but in the darkness had picked up his hat, and this he filled with water and brought it to Ralph. He forced the sufferer to drink a little, and then began to bathe him.

It was half an hour before Ralph stirred, and then all he did was to groan. Yet even this made Oliver feel easier, for he had been afraid that his chum would never regain consciousness.

As he sat there nursing Ralph, Oliver wondered what had become of Juan the Giant. He readily saw that Ralph had also been robbed, everything of value having been taken.

"The rascal! he wanted to make a clean sweep of it," muttered Oliver. "Oh, if only we can get our hands on him again one of these days! I'll not give him another chance to choke me half to death!"

An hour passed, and Ralph opened his eyes and stared around him. For several minutes he did

not speak. Then he muttered the single word, "Oliver!"

"Yes, Ralph, I am with you, and you are all right," said Oliver, soothingly.

"And Badillo?"

"Badillo is gone — I don't know where to."

"And where are we? I thought the whole mill came down on top of me."

"The flooring gave way and let you and me and Badillo down, and both of us were knocked out, I reckon."

"And Badillo is gone? Then he — he wasn't hurt?"

"I don't think he was. Any way, he is gone, and he took the trouble to rob us both before he went," added Oliver, bitterly, for he had lost a ring his mother had given him as a keepsake before he went to war.

"Robbed us, eh? Then he is certainly gone," and Ralph's face fell again.

He was not much hurt, that is, in any particular place, but told his chum that he felt as if he had been pounded for a week. He did not feel able to rise and walk, and both remained where they were until daybreak.

As the sun was coming up they saw an ox cart approaching. On the cart sat a Mexican farmer, bound for Fort Brown with some vegetables. He halted when hailed by them, and asked what was

wanted. When told that they were in distress, he readily agreed to take them to the fort because they were in uniform, and he had no desire to get into trouble with the Americans.

It was after the noon hour when Ralph and Oliver found themselves again in Matamoras. As they took themselves to their camp, the officer of the day came up to them with a severe look on his otherwise kindly face.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "I gave you but three hours' leave of absence yesterday."

"We were after a thief," answered Ralph, and he and Oliver told the particulars. Luckily the officer had heard of Badillo, and he said he would drop the charge against them, but that they had done wrong to cross the river without special permission.

"The next time you see him, get a detail to go after him," was the officer's advice, and to this they agreed, glad enough to have no further trouble for being away. In those days desertions were not uncommon, and those leaving camp without permission, or remaining away longer than their leave of absence called for, were severely punished.

It was fully a week before Ralph felt as good as before, and Oliver got over the shock he had received. In the meantime Poke Stover heard of

the affair, and got permission to make a hunt for Juan the Giant.

Poke went over the Rio Grande, and up to the old mill, — which was burnt down two weeks later, — and from this point traced Badillo twelve miles up the stream, to a ranch called La Rosa. Here he learned that Badillo had bought a horse and crossed to the Mexican side. The ranchero said he had asked the giant whither he was bound, and Badillo had said to Monterey, if he could make the distance. Whether the man had spoken the truth or not he could not tell.

Poke went over the ford and rode half the way to a village called Ponplez, and here learned that Badillo had indeed been heading for Monterey, which was many miles distant, over a country that was almost barren.

"Ain't no use o' followin' him further," said the old frontiersman to himself. "He's a-goin' right into the heart o' the enemies' country, an' we'll have to wait now till Old Rough an' Ready opens up the way for us," and he turned back.

On the edge of Ponplez Poke encountered a dozen or more Mexicans, horsemen bound westward. They pretended to be friendly, but after he had passed them two of the Mexicans treacherously turned and fired at him. He was unhurt, but his horse was so badly wounded that the animal pitched headlong. As quickly as he could

the old frontiersman returned the fire, and one Mexican was killed on the spot. Then, as the others came after him, he took to the hillside, and lost himself in the chaparral. He remained in hiding until it was dark, and then stole forward to the river bank. Half a dozen Mexicans were here watching for him, but he passed between two of the guards, and dropped into the river up to his neck. A floating bush served to conceal him from the enemy, and thus he floated down the Rio Grande for nearly a mile. Then he swam to the American shore and tramped back to Fort Brown.

At the fort the scout's story was listened to with much indignation, and twenty men sallied out at daybreak to find the Mexicans. But, though the party pushed as far as Ponplez, and two miles farther, nothing could be seen of the rascals, although the corpse of the man shot dead was found by the roadside. This was given decent burial, and then the party returned to the fort, and Poke went back to his command.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN A MEXICAN PRISON PEN

AND now, while the Army of Occupation under General Taylor was resting at Matamoras previous to its advance upon the Mexican stronghold at Monterey, let us turn to Dan and see how he has been faring since he had tried to rescue Captain Bardock, and both had been captured by the Mexican guard near Matamoras.

As the reader will remember, Captain Bardock was still unconscious when the shore was gained, nor did he come to his senses until long after he and Dan were placed in the ambulance attached to General Arista's fleeing army. He had been so close to death that for a long while Dan hardly expected him to revive.

The ambulance rolled along smoothly, for it was following a road directly over the prairies. This kept up for hours, until night was at hand. Then the ambulance halted, and an officer appeared, and with him a private carrying a smoky lantern.

"How is de offisair?" asked the Mexican, in fairly good English.

"Oh, I'm coming around gradually," said Captain Bardock, who was now sitting up. "Where are you taking me, my friend?"

"T'ank you, but I am no friend to de *Americano,*" said the Mexican officer, bluntly. "Da haf made a war which is not just. I used to like dem — now I hata dem!"

"All right — as you please about that. But will you tell me where you are going?"

"We go away, many miles."

"Then General Arista is retreating," went on Captain Bardock.

At this the Mexican officer scowled. He turned to the soldier standing by with the lantern and spoke in Spanish. The soldier went off, but soon returned bringing with him another soldier who carried several chains and handcuffs.

"We are in for it now," was the American captain's comment.

"Are they going to chain us?" asked Dan.

"It looks like it."

The pair were told to get out of the ambulance, and were then handcuffed and chained together. At a distance a camp-fire was burning in a deep hollow, which was free from water, and to this hollow the prisoners were marched.

"You will sleep there," said the Mexican officer. "If you try to escape, you will be shot."

No more was said and soon the officer went

away. The prisoners had been given nothing to eat and both were hungry.

"If we only had a bit of bread —" began Dan, when a soldier pointed his bayonet at the young man and told him to be quiet or he would run him through. After that nothing more was said, and soon the captain and Dan fell into a troubled slumber.

Marching in the extreme heat of the day was out of the question, and so the Mexican column moved half an hour before sunrise. Captain Bardock and Dan were placed in the midst of ten other prisoners chained in pairs. Before starting they were given some strong, rank coffee and some freshly-made *tortillas*, corn cakes baked upon the ashes of the camp-fire. At that time about half the work the Mexican population did was to work over the corn, crushing out the farina between a wooden roller and a big flat rock, in order that *tortillas* and other bread-like stuffs might be made.

At first the march was not difficult, but as the soldiers advanced with their prisoners the green prairies were left behind and the trail became stony and desert-like, with hollows of water few and far between. The only thing that grew was the Spanish bayonet, the prickly-pear, and the mesquite bushes, with an occasional cactus. Further to the southwestward the cacti became

more numerous, as well as the thorns, so that often they had to make long détours.

Day after day the march went on until Dan's heart sank within him. He was now many miles away from his friends, and he was satisfied that if Matamoras was taken General Taylor was not now pursuing General Arista.

"It looks as if we were doomed," he said to Captain Bardock, who remained his constant companion, although they were no longer chained together. "To escape now would be out of the question. Even if we got away we could do nothing unless we had strong horses and plenty of provisions."

"I imagine you are right there," said the captain. "Certainly, we would have a hard time of it. I have never been in Mexico before and know nothing of the roads or trails."

"Nor I, but I do know that this ground between Matamoras and Monterey is considered very hard to travel."

That night they had a terrible lesson taught to them. One of the prisoners attempted to escape in the darkness. He was followed by half a dozen soldiers on horseback. The prisoner hid in the chaparral, where he became lost. Nothing was heard of him for two days, when he was brought into camp more dead than alive. He had been without food or drink nearly all of the time,

and the sun had so affected his head that he was clearly out of his mind. At sunset, in the presence of the other prisoners, he was shot down, and the other prisoners were called upon to bury him, otherwise he would have been left where he fell.

"This is awful," said Dan, after the burial was over. "It isn't human."

"A good deal about war isn't human, Radbury," answered the captain. "We must take things as they come, and make the best of it."

The distance from Matamoras to Monterey is over two hundred miles, and by the route the army took it was a good two hundred and forty miles. Some days but little progress was made, and intense heat was often followed by disagreeable "northers" that seemed to pierce Dan's very backbone. Yet when it rained, the water was gratefully received.

At last they gained the vicinity of Monterey, which is located in a valley surrounded by very high mountains. Here the desert was left behind and all became luxuriantly tropical. The change was a great relief.

The prisoners did their best to learn how the war was going, but were told nothing. One night they were in camp, when, in the utter darkness, for a storm was coming up, they were told to get up and march.

The journey was up the mountainside and over roads which were more than rough, and lasted until nearly morning. It rained in torrents, and when at last something of a fort was reached and they were ordered to enter, each of the prisoners was wet to the skin. They were marched into a gloomy apartment which was little better than a large dungeon cell, and here they were left to themselves, an iron gate being closed and locked on them.

"Humph! I reckon we have landed at last," grumbled Dan. "And soaking wet, and in the dark, too!"

The prisoners in the dungeon numbered seven, and all were in the same condition, wet and hungry. One had the consumption and coughed continually.

"I would just as soon they would shoot me," said this man, whose name was Fordey. "I can't last long at this rate."

It was not until late in the afternoon that the prisoners were given anything to eat, and then it was musty bread which was scarcely fit to touch. In his despair Fordey threw his hard half loaf in the prison-keeper's face. For this he was knocked down and dragged out, and that was the last any of the others heard or saw of the unfortunate soldier.

"I reckon this retreat to Monterey didn't agree with the Mexicans," said Dan. "All of them look as sour as can be."

The party of six were kept in the dungeon for a week, and were then removed to a prison yard in the city. This yard was little better than a cattle-pen, with walls of logs sixteen feet high. In one corner was an open shed, where they might sleep or stay when it rained. In the centre of the yard was a Mexican brick oven, and here they had to do their own cooking of whatever was supplied to them. But this the prisoners did not mind, as it helped to pass the time.

On more than one occasion Dan wondered how Ralph and the others were faring, and tried to send them word of his whereabouts, but the letters failed to reach their destination. Captain Bardock asked that he and his companions be exchanged, but this request was not granted.

Thus the days dragged by, one very much like another, until the confinement became almost maddening. Some of the prisoners declared their intention to escape at the first opportunity, but such an opportunity seemed never to come.

"They watch us wuss nor a cat watches a mouse," declared one old soldier named Hempley. "They never let up a minit, night nor day. I've stayed awake an' watched, an' I know."

"They must think us of value," grumbled Dan. "I don't believe our men would watch greasers so."

As the weeks went by the prisoners tried to learn something of the war, but got little satisfac-

tion. Once a guard told them that General Taylor had been badly whipped in a battle, but he piled it on so thick, as the saying is, that nobody believed him.

"He's a bag of wind," grunted Hempley. "Ef thar was a battle the greasers got the wust o' it an' don't you fergit it, nuther!" And the others were inclined to agree with him.

CHAPTER XXX.

MARCHING INTO MEXICO

For Ralph and his friends there was a long wait at Matamoras, after the taking of that city by General Taylor, yet the entire army was by no means idle.

While General Kearney was pushing westward to California, small detachments of General Taylor's command went out and captured Camargo, Mier, Reynoso, and other points of more or less importance. In each of these cases the Mexicans fell back before a regular engagement could be drawn on.

Camargo is up the Rio Grande, over a hundred miles from Matamoras, and not quite that distance from Monterey, which lies to the southwest. At this time it was a place of small consequence, but it has since grown to some importance.

During the summer of 1847, there were several important political changes in the Mexican Republic. Paredes had been overthrown, and General Santa Anna was again called to the front, in spite of the defeat he had suffered in Texas, at the

hands of General Sam Houston. It was thought by all people in the United States that he would stand for peace, but as soon as he was sure of his footing this wily soldier prepared to conduct the war on a larger scale than ever.

It was now certain that the Mexicans intended to make their fight at or near Monterey, and in August General Taylor began his forward movements once more. The heat was tremendous, and it was decided that only a portion of the troops should go by land to Camargo, the balance, and all the supplies, going by water up the river. The troops on land marched only by night, and rested during the main part of the day.

Luckily for Ralph and Oliver, they went to Camargo by boat, — the conveyance being a wheezy little steamer that had all she could do to make progress against the strong current. Poke went overland, and the young soldiers did not see him again for some time, nor did they see George Nolan, who had gone home because of his wound.

The voyage to Camargo was not without interest, and there was one incident happened which Ralph and Oliver never forgot, and which made them think more of their beloved commander than ever.

The steamer carried not alone the soldiers, but also a number of sick men, sutlers, army contractors, and newspaper correspondents. When

General Taylor came on board, he found that the best of the staterooms had been taken by the outsiders, and that the sick men had been left on the deck!

"This won't do, gentlemen," he said, sternly. "You will have to vacate, and let the wounded have the berths," and amid some grumbling the outsiders did so.

"I don't think Old Rough and Ready will give up his room," said one of the sutlers. "He'll turn us out, but he'll take care of himself, never fear."

But the sutler was mistaken. When some officers went to look for General Taylor the next morning, they found that he had placed a wounded soldier in his private stateroom. They continued their hunt, and at last found the commander on the deck, rolled in a blanket, and sleeping as peacefully as a child! It is no wonder the soldiers would do anything for such a leader.

After a brief rest at Camargo, it was ordered that the army advance to Ceralvo, a little town at the foot of the Sierra Madre Mountains, over a hundred miles from Camargo. The road was rough and barren, and during the trip but little rain fell, leaving the army suffering for water.

General Taylor divided his army into three divisions. General Worth led the advance on the last of August; Colonel Twiggs followed on Sep-

tember 5th; and General Quitman brought up the rear on September 17th.

After a march which to the young soldiers seemed to have no end, Ceralvo was reached, and here they rested for several days beside a cooling stream which came tumbling down from the lofty mountains in crystal clearness. All around were empty farmhouses, showing that the inhabitants had fled before the coming of the Americans. Here and there rancheros and guerillas were found, stealing what they could lay their hands on, and lying most outrageously to clear themselves when caught.

At last the march was resumed, through a mountain gap, where the cliffs on either side were hundreds and hundreds of feet high. The scenery was grand, and the young soldiers could not but contemplate it with wonder as they advanced.

"Beats anything I ever saw!" declared Oliver. "What a wealth of mineral must be here!"

"Yes, Oliver, but it will be a big task to get it out, I reckon," replied Ralph. "And the average Mexican is too lazy to shovel dirt, even to look for gold and silver."

The mountain passed, they came out on the swiftly flowing San Juan River, and after another halt of a day, passed along to the village of San Francisco. They were now within ten miles of

Monterey, and everybody felt that a big battle was close at hand.

"And we'll have ter fight, no mistake about thet!" declared Poke Stover. "They have had plenty o' time to git a large army together, an' Monterey is a reg'lar fortress in itself, so I've been told."

Monterey lay in the midst of the mountains, some of which rose four thousand feet above the town. From a gorge to the west flowed the San Juan, and along this ran the road to Saltillo, another important city. Monterey boasted of ten thousand inhabitants, but thousands of other people had flocked hither for protection.

The pompous General Arista, after the fall of Matamoras, had been succeeded by General Ampudia, and the latter commander had gathered in and around Monterey an army of ten thousand, to combat which General Taylor had less than seven thousand men.

The defences of the town were very complete. Not far from the road running to Ceralvo was the citadel, two hundred feet square, and with walls built of solid rock, twelve feet thick. At each angle were openings for seven guns, and below all was a wide ditch filled with water.

On the east side of the city was a fort commanding four guns, and back of this two redoubts, with a long line of fortification running southward.

On the northwest of the city was Independence Hill, with two forts, and opposite this, on the other side of the river, was Federation Hill, also fortified.

The fortifications did not end here. All the roads and trails were barricaded with bags and stones, and each street of the city possessed several pieces of artillery.

General Taylor felt that he had a large piece of work cut out for him, yet he did not falter. His first movement was to send out the Texan Rangers, accompanied by the topographical engineers, to obtain correct information concerning the city's defences and, if possible, the disposal of the Mexican troops. With this party went Poke Stover.

That night the information came in, and without delay General Worth was ordered to take a position on the extreme right, with eighteen hundred men. This position lay on the Saltillo road, and Worth was expected to cut off any retreat contemplated by the Mexicans, and also, if he could, to reduce the fortifications in the vicinity. He moved as far as he was able that day, and encamped on the hillside during the night. His fires were discovered by the Mexicans, who immediately sent a shower of grape-shot in that direction. Then the fires were put out, and the command took up a new position under cover of darkness.

In the morning General Worth continued his movement toward the Saltillo road, and soon came upon a body of Mexican lancers. On these some Texan Rangers charged with fury, and soon a smart skirmish ensued. The Mexican commander was killed, and so were many of his men. The enemy tried to drive the Americans from their position, but failed, and in the end had to retreat to the chaparral, leaving their killed and wounded behind them.

In the meantime the main body of General Taylor's army was resting on the plain before the city. A heavy mist hung over the mountains, and the soldiers moved about silently, feeling that the next twenty-four hours might have a terrible tale to tell. It was felt that the Mexicans would resist to the utmost.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE STORMING OF MONTEREY

"COMPANY attention! Forward, march!"

It was a command given early in the morning, and soon the command to which Ralph and Oliver belonged were advancing over the plain before Monterey.

From a distance came a booming of cannon, followed by the constant cracking of infantry. Over the mountains still hung the mist, but the sun was struggling through, and soon the mist rolled away.

The young soldiers had passed a restless night, and Ralph had been on guard duty for several hours. But they had had a good breakfast and felt in fighting humour.

The advance was a silent one, and at a distance they could see various commands hurrying in as many different directions. General Twigg's division was near the fort on the Ceralvo road, the cavalry, under Woods and May, was riding swiftly to reinforce General Worth, and following them came the Rangers from Texas; General Quitman,

"'DON'T LAG!' SHOUTED RALPH. 'COME ON!'"

with the Mississippi and Tennessee volunteers, was also near the fort just mentioned, but apart from the other troops, and stretched out beyond were the dragoons, under General Butler, and the Ohio and Kentucky volunteers.

It was not long before the fighting became general around the whole semicircle. Shot and shell fell in all directions, and again and again the United States regulars and the volunteers returned to the assault. The air was heavy with smoke, and mingled with the constant discharge of large and small arms came the shrieks of the wounded and dying.

Presently Ralph and Oliver found themselves moving over a rough road leading to a hillside upon which was located one of the Mexican forts. Here the cannon were blazing away madly, and in a twinkle several members of the company were cut down.

"Oh, but this is terrible!" panted Oliver. His face was covered with perspiration and gun-smoke, and he was dirt and dust from head to foot.

"Don't lag!" shouted Ralph. "Come on!" And away they went, with thirty or forty others, up the hill. They fired as they ran and reloaded with all possible rapidity. Then of a sudden they found themselves at the edge of a ravine ten feet wide and exceedingly deep. In the rush several soldiers had gone into the ravine and now clung to the brush and vines growing on the sides.

What was to do next? Should they attempt to leap the ravine, or should they retreat? Ralph looked at his captain, and so did Oliver.

"Over we go, boys!" shouted the captain. "Follow me!" And he made the leap in safety. Several went after, and then Ralph jumped. As he gained the opposite bank he saw Oliver jump. But the young soldier's attempt was not strong enough, and he merely hit the bank with his knee. As he was sinking Ralph caught hold of him and pulled him up.

"Good for you, Ralph!" cried Oliver, but there was no time to say more. The fort was still five hundred feet away, and the Mexicans were now firing more continuously than ever. Suddenly they saw their captain go down, badly wounded, and three others followed.

"We must go back!" shouted a sergeant, but his voice was drowned out by the roar of the cannon, followed by the cracking of musketry, and the company went on, with the balance of the regiment following. The ground was torn up by cannon-balls, and more than one soldier was blinded by the flying dirt.

When the fort was almost gained a perfect hail of grape-shot swept through the Americans. A dozen soldiers were mowed down as with a scythe. Some of the shot hit the ground again, and sand and loose pebbles flew in all directions.

In the uproar that followed Ralph was knocked down, and several soldiers ran over him before he could get up again. Then, while still on his knees, he heard a shriek from Oliver.

"My eyes!" cried the young soldier. "My eyes! I am blind!" And he put out his hands before him.

"Oliver!" exclaimed Ralph and turned toward his chum. He saw that Oliver's face was covered with blood. Then several hundred troops swept that way, and in a twinkle the pair were again separated.

Feeling that he could not get back, and that it was his duty to go forward, Ralph turned once more. The catastrophe to Oliver seemed to stun his heart, and a mad rage filled him to "square accounts" for the happening. Before he knew it, he was face to face with a lean and cruel-looking Mexican and blazed away full into the man's face. As the soldier fell, he leaped over the body, and a few steps more took him to the wall of the fort.

The United States troops were already in the fort, but the day was far from won. The main fighting was around the gun-carriages, and in the midst of this some reinforcements for the Mexicans came over the mountains. From the top of one of the hills they took the Americans in the rear and our friends were forced to retreat.

It was now well along in the afternoon, and nobody had had anything to eat since early morning. Yet the fighting continued until every soldier was so exhausted he could scarcely stand. As for Ralph, his head was in a whirl, and he hardly knew if he had any feet left or not.

But Ralph was not the only one who was bewildered. The fighting had been so fierce, and so many movements had been made, both around the forts and at the various entrances to the town, that many soldiers had lost track of their commands and were fighting with whatever body of troops happened at hand. General Butler had entered the city on the north, but had been driven back. Then he undertook to take Fort Diabolo, but was again repulsed, and he was sadly wounded. Out of three hundred men a Tennessee regiment lost one hundred on that day, — one man out of every three!

At last night came, and with it a cold and cheerless rain to add to the soldiers' discomforts. Ralph had lost track of his company and also track of Oliver, and found himself in a muddy hollow on a hillside, among a number of troops from Mississippi. Ordinarily these men would have given him shelter and supper, but this they did not even have for themselves.

"Got ter make the best o' it, sonny," said one old rifleman. "Ye kin be thankful ye ain't killed."

"I am thankful, but I would like to get back to my company even so," replied Ralph.

"Wot's the command?"

The young soldier told him, and the rifleman from Mississippi "allowed as how he had seen some of 'em a smart step down the valley." Without delay Ralph moved in that direction, and about ten o'clock found half of the command sleeping in the semi-shelter of a cliff. Officers and men were huddled together indiscriminately, and the guards were all more than two-thirds asleep, too. But they had little to fear, for in the city the Mexicans were just as exhausted.

At last Ralph found two surgeons who were doing what they could for the wounded. One of these had found Oliver and taken him to a small farmhouse not far away.

"Some pebbles were dashed into his face by a cannon-ball," said a surgeon. "The wound is painful but not dangerous."

"But his eyesight —" faltered Ralph.

"I can't tell much about that as yet. I am afraid, though, he will lose the sight of one eye, and it may be both eyes."

"Can I see him?"

"It won't do any good and it may only unnerve him. I had quite a job of it to get him quiet. Let him rest, at least for a day or two, and then we'll see what comes of it."

With this remark Ralph had to be content. But as he walked toward the command under the cliff his heart sank like a lump of lead within his breast.

"Dan missing and now Oliver likely to go blind," he muttered to himself. "Perhaps to-morrow it will be my turn." Then he grated his teeth and pulled himself together. "Pshaw! such is the fortunes of war. I've simply got to make the best of it. It's no use turning calf over it!" And then he hurried on with a firmer step. Yet after he had laid down it was a long, long while before slumber came to him, worn out though he was.

On the following morning it rained so hard that many of the troops did not move. Several forts had been captured, and these were held and that was all.

In the meantime, however, General Worth pushed forward his work with renewed vigour. He selected Lieutenant-Colonel Childs to lead a strong force against the redoubt on Independence Hill. The force consisted of five companies of infantry, one of artillery and a selected body of two hundred Texan riflemen under Colonel Hays.

The hill was steep, the rain and mist were still thick, and the soldiers had all they could do to climb from crag to crag. But with grim determination they kept at their task until close to the redoubt. Then the Mexicans opened fire on them.

"Fire!" ordered Childs. "And forward, every man of you! Now or never!" And forward they did go, at such a speed that the Mexicans became fairly panic-stricken, and as the United States troops rushed in at one end of the fort, they rushed out at the other end, and down the hill, and the victory was won.

The Mexicans from Independence Hill had fled to a fort known as the Palace. As soon as it could be done, some artillery was hauled up to the top of the hill and trained on the Palace with a plunging fire.

The Mexicans at the Palace could not reply to this fire, and the commander at once gave orders that Independence Hill should be retaken. To counteract this movement General Worth sent forward some extra troops to reinforce Childs.

The shock, as the Mexicans came up the hill, was terrific, and for a long while the battle raged most furiously, with favour first on one side and then on the other. But at last the Mexicans broke and ran, first to the Palace and then toward the city. Childs followed, and at the Palace turned their own guns on them, and then followed them to the city gates. This done, Worth's command was massed at the Palace and preparations were made to bombard Monterey on the next day.

Early on the 23d, General Taylor joined General Quitman and sent the latter forward to the first

of the city roads. Here it was found that the Mexicans had fallen back during the night, and the United States troops went ahead from one barricade to another. The advance was led by Colonel Jefferson Davis, afterward the President of the Confederate States during the great Civil War. Once in the city, the movement was from house to house. With the troops were many sharpshooters, and these men would make their way to the roofs of buildings and bring down every Mexican in sight.

The news of what was going on at one end of the city induced General Worth to try a similar plan at the other end, and soon a column of his soldiers, armed with sledge-hammers, crowbars, picks, and shovels gained some of the houses on the outskirts. These stood in long rows, and the soldiers advanced by breaking through the wall of one house into the next. The Mexicans fired on them constantly, but could do little damage.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ESCAPE FROM THE PRISON PEN

"CAPTAIN BARDOCK, do you hear that shooting?" asked Dan, one morning, shortly after arising from his damp bed in a corner of the prison yard shed.

"I do — and I have heard it for the past half-hour," answered the captain.

"Do you think a bombardment is going on?"

"Hardly, for the shots are not close enough. But I wouldn't be surprised if General Taylor is advancing."

"I hope he is coming. I am sick and tired of this life, and I would do almost anything to get away, wouldn't you?"

"Well, if there is a fight we may run a chance, Radbury. We might —"

Captain Bardock broke off short, for the prison guard had appeared. At once one of the prisoners ran up to him and asked him what the firing meant.

"It is a salute in honour of another victory," he answered, sourly.

"I don't believe it," cried Dan, when told of this. "Really, I believe some of these chaps would rather lie than tell the truth."

The day wore along slowly, and gradually the cannonading drew closer. Then it began to rain heavily and the prisoners crawled into the shed to keep dry.

"It is a bombardment," said the captain. "Boys, we may have a chance to get away soon. If so, we ought to stick together."

"We'll stick by you, cap," answered one old soldier. And all of the others said practically the same thing. There were now fifteen prisoners in the pen.

"If we could only get hold of some weapons," said Dan.

"We might throw the guard and get their three guns," said another.

"It won't do — just yet," said the captain. "But the time may be ripe to-morrow, if General Taylor is really coming."

On the next day the prisoners were certain that the city was surrounded. The firing was now close at hand, and once a shell went whizzing over the prison pen. Instead of alarming the prisoners this made them all feel better.

"Hurrah for Uncle Sam!" cried Dan. "May he gain a speedy victory."

Late that afternoon one of the prisoners came from the gate in wild excitement.

"The guard is gone and the gate is wide open!" he cried. "Now is our chance, boys!"

At once every soldier was seized with the uncontrollable desire to get away, and in a twinkle all were at the gates, which were indeed wide open. Out they ran, into the muddy street. It was raining in torrents and not a soul was in sight.

"Which way shall we —" began one of the prisoners, when of a sudden half a dozen Mexican soldiers appeared bringing along two wounded cavalrymen. As soon as the soldiers saw our friends they dropped the wounded men and drew up their guns.

"Stop!" roared one, in Spanish. "The prisoners! Fire on them!" And the men blazed away. Two of the prisoners were killed and two wounded. Dan received a scratch in the hip, but did not notice it at the time.

"Follow me!" cried Captain Bardock to Dan, and led the way to the nearest house. They burst in the front door, ran through, and came out at the rear. Here they found an axe on a chopping-block and the captain caught up the weapon. They continued to run until they reached a line of sheds which were being used by the Mexicans for cavalry horses.

One other prisoner had followed them, a man named Dawson, and now the three crept into a

dark corner of the shed and pulled some loose hay over them.

"Are they coming?" asked Dan, in a whisper, after several minutes of silence.

"Somebody is," said Dawson. "Listen!"

They listened and heard the tramp of many feet. Presently several cavalrymen came into the shed, one leading a horse that was wounded in the fore shoulder. The Mexicans were wet to the skin and very angry over something, and swore roundly to each other as they cared for the horse, which, as it afterward came out, was the animal of one of their generals.

Hardly daring to breathe, our friends kept in the hay and remained there for many hours. The Mexicans came and went, and one brought two more horses. In one of the holsters of a saddle was a loaded pistol, and Dan could see it plainly, yet he did not dare to crawl out, much as he coveted the weapon.

As night came on the firing in the distance let up. The Mexicans cared for the horses, and some sat around smoking and talking earnestly. Presently one after another went out, until the last was gone.

"Now is our chance," whispered Captain Bardock, and emerged from the hay. Dan and Dawson followed, and Dan at once secured the pistol he had been eyeing so long.

It was a question which way they should go. They had tried to locate the United States army by the shots, but the firing had come from many directions.

"I'll follow you, captain," said Dan, and Dawson said the same.

With extreme caution they stole from the shed and tried to pierce the darkness around them. At first they could see nothing, for there were no street lights and many of the houses in the vicinity were dark.

"I think we'll find a gate in this direction," whispered Captain Bardock. He pointed with his hand, and like three shadows they stole down the highway, which was narrow and littered with rubbish of every description.

Several squares had been covered, when they heard the tread of many feet. A regiment of Mexican soldiers was approaching.

"We must hide!" cried Dan.

"Come, yonder house is open," returned the captain, and ran across the street. Here was a small yard, surrounded with an ancient stone wall. All three leaped the wall and ran across the yard, to where the front door to a goodly sized stone dwelling stood ajar.

Hardly had they entered the house than the Mexican soldiers began to pass. They marched slowly, in a column of fours, and it took some

time for them to get by. Fearing one or another might come into the house, Captain Bardock closed and barred the door.

The room the three had entered was pitch-dark, and for several minutes they thought the dwelling deserted. But as the last of the soldiers passed they heard heavy footsteps overhead.

"Somebody is coming!" said Dawson. "We must hide!"

But hiding was not so easy, for the room was square and bare. In another moment they heard a man coming down the stairs. He carried a lighted lamp in his hand. Over his shoulder was slung a big bag which he evidently carried with difficulty.

In another second Dan caught sight of the man's face, and the young soldier could not suppress a cry of amazement. The man was Juan Badillo!

Almost at the same time the giant caught sight of the three Americans. He stopped short, not knowing what to do.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, in a surly tone.

"Juan the Giant!" cried Dan. "Don't you know me?"

But the Mexican said no more. Instead he shifted the lamp to his other hand and started to draw his pistol. But before he could do this, Dan

had him covered with the weapon taken from the horse-shed.

"You must know this man," said Captain Bardock.

"I do know him. He is nothing but a dirty horse thief, who is badly wanted in Texas."

"Then I'll wager he's been looting this shebang," put in Dawson. "That bag has got silverware in it." And the soldier pointed to where a silver dish stuck through a hole in the side of the bag.

At this moment came a thumping on the floor overhead, as though somebody was knocking with his foot.

"What does that mean?" asked Dan.

The thumping stopped for a moment and then it was repeated.

"I believe somebody is tied fast up there," was Captain Bardock's comment. "If you'll watch this fellow I'll go up and see."

"I'll watch him," answered Dan. "Badillo, just you drop that bag."

"You mak mistake," growled the giant. "I no steal noddings."

"Drop the bag, I say."

"You mak mistake." The Mexican looked toward the door and then toward a back window which was open. "Ask de man up-stairs about dis. He ask me to take his t'ings away for heem."

By this time the captain was half-way up the stairs. Suddenly Juan the Giant hurled the lamp at Dan and made a dash for the back window.

As the lamp sailed through the air, Dan fired and the Mexican was hit in the shoulder. The lamp grazed Dan's arm and fell in a corner. The light was extinguished, leaving all in total darkness. Then Badillo leaped for the window, with Dawson after him. The soldier could not step the rascal, but he caught hold of the bag and it fell to the floor, scattering the contents in every direction.

"Where is he?" cried Dan, as soon as he could recover from dodging the lamp.

"Gone — out of the window."

"Too bad!"

"But I made him leave the bag behind him."

"Did you fire that shot, Radbury?" came from the stairs.

"Yes."

"I wish you hadn't. It may bring the Mexican guard down on us."

After this, all three of the Americans became silent, one listening at the window and one at the door. But Badillo was gone, and all was quiet save for the tramping of some soldiers in the distance.

"Would that man have nerve enough to send

the guard after us?" questioned the captain, at length.

"I hardly think so — not if he was stealing here," answered Dan.

The thumping above was now repeated, and after another pause Captain Bardock crept up the stairs and into a rear chamber. It was so dark he could not see his hand before his face. But feeling around he soon reached a bed, and upon this found an elderly man, who was gagged and bound hands and feet.

It took the captain but a minute to ungag the prisoner, who at once began to gasp for breath.

"The villain! Where is he?" demanded the man, in excellent English.

"Hullo, are you an American?" exclaimed the captain, in surprise.

"I am — and so are you men, by your talk. But where is that thief of a Mexican?"

"Gone."

"With all my silver and gold!" The elderly man gave a groan.

"No, we got the bag away from him."

"Good for you!" The man paused in relief. "What brought you here?" he went on, presently.

"Can I trust you?"

"Certainly you can."

"I and two companions escaped from the prison

pen some squares below here, and we are now trying to make our way to the army outside the city. We came in here to escape some soldiers who were passing."

"I understand. Well, I'll do what I can for you. I am an American, but I am well known here, and so far the authorities have not molested me. Untie me, and then I'll make a light and we can have a look at each other."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BATTLE OF BUENA VISTA — CONCLUSION

FIVE minutes after the above conversation, all the shutters to the house were carefully closed and bolted, and then the owner of the dwelling made a light, while the three escaped prisoners gathered around him.

"I don't know if you ever heard of me," he said, as he looked at the three. "My name is Barton Cardell, and the greasers around here call me the Silver Finder. I have a brother over in Texas who is a ranchman."

"Barton Cardell!" ejaculated Dan. "Yes, I have heard of you. When I was on my way to join General Taylor's army I stopped at the ranch of your brother Henry. He spoke about having a brother here, and also a sister."

"My sister was here, but as soon as it looked like trouble I sent her away to join my brother Henry. He wanted me to come away, but I thought it best to remain here and look after my mining interests. Generally, the Mexicans are

honest enough, but there is no telling what they will do in war times."

"It's a wonder you weren't ordered away," put in Captain Bardock.

"I would have been, most likely, only it happens that one of the Mexican generals is an old friend of mine, and a partner in one of my mining schemes. He fixed it so that I could remain here. But I never expected to be attacked as I was," added Barton Cardell, gravely.

"How did the thief get in on you?" questioned Dawson.

"In a very underhanded way. He came here stating that he had a private message for me from my brother. I let him in, not suspecting anything wrong. While I was trying to read the paper he gave me, he struck me down, pounced upon me and gagged me. Then he carried me up-stairs and made me a prisoner as you found me."

"Of course the letter was a hoax," said Dan, "although he may know your brother."

"Yes, he must know my brother and must have known that I had many things of value in this house. Here is the paper, which is, as you say, a hoax. But you seem to know the rascal," went on the mine owner.

"I do — only too well," answered Dan, and told of the past, to which Barton Cardell listened with close attention.

The bag was then opened and found to contain a great variety of silver and other ware, besides knives, forks, and spoons, all to the value of at least a thousand dollars.

"I owe you something for coming to my rescue," said the gentleman of the house.

"Well, get us safe into the American lines and I'll call it square so far as I am concerned," answered Captain Bardock.

"And so will I," said Dan, and Dawson said practically the same thing.

"I'll do what I can for you," answered Barton Cardell. "But for to-night, I fancy the best you can do is to stay right here. Under this house is a secret cellar, and if the worst comes, I can hide you in that."

So it was arranged, and after this the mine owner proceeded to provide them with the best meal the dwelling afforded. All had now become quiet, and, satisfied that their newly found friend would do all he could for them, the three sank down to rest and were soon in profound slumber.

In the meantime, even though it was night, the army under General Taylor was not idle. One place of vantage after another was taken and held. These places included the cemetery, where a mortar was placed which threw shells for hours upon the Mexican soldiers stationed in the Plaza. In addition to this two twelve-pound howitzers and

a six-pound gun were raised upon a housetop at the end of the town and trained along the principal street. Thus General Taylor was prepared, at daybreak, to continue the contest with fearful results.

General Ampudia was in a quandary, and held a council of war. All appeared now to be lost, and many were for an unconditional surrender. The meeting broke up in deep gloom, and the Mexican commander sent one of his generals to ask General Worth his terms of surrender. From General Worth he got no satisfaction, and early in the morning he went personally to General Taylor.

A long conference ensued, and in the end a commission was appointed to draft the terms of surrender. It was agreed that the citadel be evacuated immediately and the city in seven days. All of the public property was to be turned over to the United States, along with the most of the artillery, and it was further agreed that hostilities should cease for six weeks, during which time another effort might be made to end the war. In the fall of Monterey, the Americans lost about five hundred in killed and wounded; the Mexican loss was twice as large.

When the news spread that the Mexicans had surrendered, the whole American army went wild with joy, and the celebration lasted for several days. The Mexicans were allowed to salute their

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flag when lowered at the citadel, but this salutation was nothing compared to the demonstration when the glorious stars and stripes were flung to the breeze.

At last came the day when the American troops marched into the city and took formal possession. It was a gala-day and one long to be remembered. Yet with all the good cheer around him, Ralph's heart was heavy, for Oliver was still in the hospital suffering from the wounds to his eyes, and nothing had been heard of Dan since his disappearance.

Down the main street of Monterey swept Ralph's command, and the young soldier was thinking of nothing in particular, when of a sudden he came to a dead halt.

"Dan!" he burst out, and forgetting all military rules he ran to the sidewalk, and at the same time Dan hurried from Barton Cardell's house to meet him. In another moment the two brothers were in each other's arms.

"I was afraid you were dead!" went on Ralph. "Where have you been?"

"It's a long story, Ralph," answered Dan, with a happy smile. "I have been a prisoner. I see you are well. How are Poke and Ollie?"

"Poke is all right, but poor Ollie has had his eyes hurt. Come on." And now Ralph went after his company, and Dan followed. In an hour the parade came to an end, and then each told his

story in detail. While this was going on Poke came up.

"By the eternal, ef it ain't our Dan!" burst out the old frontiersman, and gripped the young soldier's hand till Dan winced. "An' well as ever! I declar, you're a sight fer sore eyes, hang me ef ye ain't!"

"And I am glad to see you, too," answered Dan. "It feels like being home once more."

"We've fit a great battle, Dan; General Taylor's victory is a mighty one."

"I know it, Poke, and I dare say you and Ralph covered yourselves with glory."

"We tried to do our duty," answered Ralph. "But let me tell you frankly, I am glad we are now to have a rest."

And to this remark all of the others agreed.

A few words more and I will bring to a close this story of military adventure, "With Taylor on the Rio Grande."

With the fall of Monterey there was a cessation of hostilities until the middle of the coming November. During that time General Ampudia was taken from command and cast into prison, and the cruel-hearted, overbearing General Santa Anna came once more to the front to battle with the Americans.

Santa Anna brought together a large army, and

the American forces were as speedily as possible reorganised to give him battle. But in the meantime General Scott, commander-in-chief of the American forces, announced that he would lead an army into Mexico against the Mexican capital, and on this expedition he took with him many of the troops which had formerly served under General Taylor.

Early in the new year found General Worth at Saltillo. The Mexican army was not far distant, and it was rumoured that Santa Anna meant to fall upon Worth and others and destroy them. At once General Taylor advanced to the rescue.

These movements brought on the memorable battle of Buena Vista. Santa Anna had under him twenty thousand of the pick of the Mexican army, and the two armies came within sight of each other on February 22d, — Washington's Birthday. Santa Anna sent word to General Taylor that he was surrounded and asked him to surrender. Our gallant commander politely declined; and soon the battle was on.

All afternoon the fighting raged, first at one point and then at another. The Mexicans were very bold, and in one attack three hundred were laid low by our riflemen. When night came all were exhausted, but at daybreak the fighting was renewed. General Taylor had fallen back toward Saltillo, and Santa Anna now attacked in three

columns and more hotly than ever. At first some of our troops were disorganised and routed, but the majority returned to the contest. It was a day never to be forgotten, and one on which many a soldier covered himself with glory. At last night came on again, but the victory was within the grasp of the Americans, and when the sun shone again it was found that Santa Anna had fled. The cheering that followed was maddening, and the whole army went almost crazy with joy. Less than five thousand Americans had put to rout twenty thousand Mexicans; and that first campaign under the villainous Santa Anna came to a swift and ignoble end.

Shortly after his brilliant victory at Buena Vista, General Taylor obtained leave of absence and departed for Louisiana. His return to the States was a most triumphal one, and on March 4, 1849, he was inaugurated as President of the United States, receiving at the hands of a grateful people the greatest gift at their command.

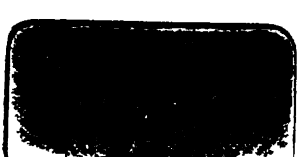
Soon after the fall of Monterey, Mr. Fielding came down to Matamoras to look after Oliver, who had been removed to the city on the Rio Grande. He found his son doing fairly well. Neither of the young soldier's eyes was permanently injured, yet the surgeons agreed that he had best give up army life for the present. Accordingly, he was invalided home, and his father went with him.

"I wish you all luck," said Oliver to Ralph and Dan, on parting with his chums. "If you go ahead with Old Rough and Ready, be sure and come back covered with glory."

"But we are not going ahead with General Taylor," answered Dan. "We have been ordered to join General Scott's command. You know he is going to set out against Mexico City itself."

What Dan said was true. Among the troops to join General Scott were the commands to which he and Poke belonged, and also the regiment of which Ralph was a member. The future adventures of the Radburys and their friends will be told in another volume of this series, to be entitled, "Under Scott in Mexico." In this story we will meet many of our old characters again, and also learn what became of that rascal known as Juan the Giant.

And now let us say good-bye to all. In former days Ralph's favourite cry had been, "Hurrah for the liberty of Texas! Hurrah for the heroes of San Jacinto!" Now the young soldier had a new cheer, and in this let us join him:

"Hurrah for Old Rough and Ready! Hurrah for the heroes of the Rio Grande!"

THE END.